Australian Consumers' Association September 1994

CHOICE

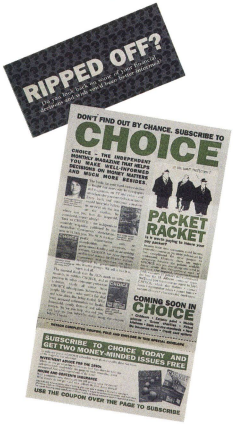
Are you being served?

Does bank service match the PR?

BUYING A NEW KITCHEN
What to look for, and traps to avoid

GETTING INTO HOT WATER
Scald prevention vs long hot showers

TESTS
Washing machines
Ready-cooked frozen meals
Oven cleaners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DON'T FIND OUT BY CHANCE. SUBSCRIBE TO
CHOICE
PACKET RACKET
COMING SOON IN CHOICE
SUBSCRIBE TO CHOICE TODAY AND GET TWO MONEY-MINDED ISSUES FREE
USE THE COUPON OVER THE PAGE TO SUBSCRIBE

Editorial

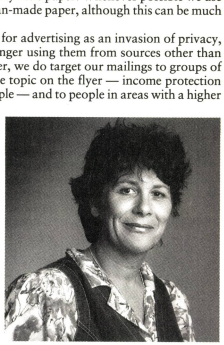
DON'T BE SURPRISED, or annoyed, if a leaflet inviting you to subscribe to CHOICE arrives in your letterbox or drops out of your second-favourite magazine.

To carry on and expand the work we do on behalf of Australian consumers, we have to be very energetic in recruiting new subscribers to CHOICE, as most of the income that allows us to test products and services and pass on that information comes from CHOICE subscriptions.

The best response we get to our promotions comes from putting flyers in other magazines and from letterbox drops.

We're very aware that some people object to junk mail in the letterbox. We think we have an important message for all Australian consumers, and we try to make our leaflets as full of real information as possible — truthful, unambiguous and complete. We also ensure our economical pack uses very little paper. Whenever possible we use 100% recycled, oxygen-bleached, Australian-made paper, although this can be much more difficult to obtain than we'd like.

Some people see the use of mailing lists for advertising as an invasion of privacy, so we've decided to experiment with no longer using them from sources other than our own list of former subscribers. However, we do target our mailings to groups of people who are likely to be interested in the topic on the flyer — income protection insurance or exterior house paint, for example — and to people in areas with a higher than average proportion of potential CHOICE subscribers. This means you might receive one of our mailings even though you're already a subscriber — since they aren't addressed there's no way of avoiding this.



We hope that if you do receive one of our leaflets you'll pass it on to a friend who may be interested in receiving CHOICE. Just write 'recommended by' with your name and subscriber number on the coupon you pass on, and if your friend subscribes we'll send you a $10 book voucher.

Janice McEwen
Marketing Manager

OOPS!

If you're a long-term subscriber who recently received a puzzling letter welcoming you to CHOICE and asking if you'd enjoyed your first four issues, rest assured it was us having a slight attack of insanity, not you.

To be more precise, it was our computer — instead of picking out the names and addresses of people who'd been subscribing for just four months, it had a brainstorm and pulled out an entirely wrong set of addresses. Unfortunately we discovered this too late to stop the letters going out, and would like to apologise to all the subscribers who incorrectly received one. We value your long-term support greatly.

CHOICE regularly sends a letter to new subscribers after their first four months, asking for their views on the magazine and offering the opportunity to extend their subscription to two years at a discount price: $41 for the second year instead of $48.

Of course all subscribers can take advantage of this two-year discount offer when you renew your subscription — just tick the appropriate box on the renewal form we send you.

VOLUME 35 SEPTEMBER 1994 NUMBER 9

Cover photo: Rhonda Thwaite

Next issue

Childcare, lawn edgers, 'unstainable' carpet, pedestal fans, solar-powered lamps, new contraceptives, 'green' charities.

November, December, January

Tests: Washing machines, food processors, baby monitors, compost bins, champagne, home security locks, chipper/shredders, portable hifi systems, sunscreen fabrics, timers, insect repellents.

Features: Products for the disabled, dealing with your body corporate, profile of the food market, the CHOICE Annual Christmas Buying Guide, aged care, appliance servicing.

4 Choice Cuts

Doctors' fees victory; returnable cartridges for laser printers; fire safety; 'gas buses' benefit the environment and commuters; Black Friday really is black.

6 Next please! — How does your bank rate for customer service?

While our survey found the average wait in a bank queue was less than five minutes, the longest was 27, and plenty of people waited 20 minutes or more. How well do banks' PR and advertising really match the service small consumers receive?

8 Getting around: public transport

Ask most public transport users what they think of it and they say it's reliable — but non-users who answered our survey don't agree. They want more frequent, reliable and faster services. But who will pay for them?

12 Shopping around

The cost of public transport around the world.

13 Buying a kitchen

Once it was a big deal to buy a new stove or fridge for the kitchen. Now it seems fashionable to replace the whole room every few years! What are the traps if you play this big-money game, and how can you avoid them?

20 Some like it hot

The temperature in many Australian hot water systems is dangerously high — particularly for young children, who can receive horrific scalds in as little as a second from the hot tap in most bathrooms. This article looks at the result of a trial to test one possible solution: lowering the water temperature in the tank. The outcome wasn't as simple as it sounds.

23 Test: Ready-cooked frozen meals

Some good news about processed foods for a change: we found most of the frozen meals marketed as 'lean' and 'healthy' fared reasonably well in nutrition terms. But will they satisfy your appetite?

26 Letters

Health vs travel insurance; registering warranties by phone; car steering locks.

27 Consumer Bookshelf

30 Bodywise

Exercises to strengthen your back.

32 Consumer-in-law: Credit Reference Association

Myths abound about the type of information the Credit Reference Association holds about you and how it's used. We explain what it does and doesn't do, how to get a copy of your file to check it's correct, and discuss whether the CRA still serves a useful purpose, given the restrictions on it and some errors in its files.

37 Test: Washing machines

We've put our money where our environmental mouth is, and started testing washing machines with a cold water wash. Our first all-new test rates models up to 5.5 kg load size, and in November we'll bring you the results for many larger models.

42 Test: Oven cleaners

Non-caustic oven cleaners are on the increase, and our tests found some that performed just as well as the traditional caustic products. But you still need to wear some protective gear when you use them.

46 What do you know?

Test yourself with our regular consumer quiz.

Doctors' fees

SURGICAL REMOVAL OF CASH

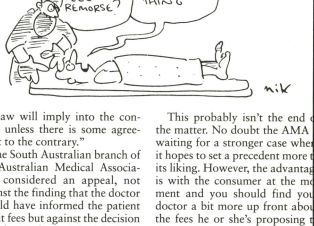
HEALTH CONSUMERS had a major victory earlier this year when a South Australian magistrate ruled that a patient only had to pay the Medicare Schedule fee because the doctor had not told him beforehand the fee would be anything more.

The decision has important ramifications for consumers. It puts the onus on the doctor to bring up the discussion of fees and explain what they mean rather than letting him or her just send a bill after the event and leaving it at that.

The case involved John Smith, a Whyalla police sergeant, who underwent a throat operation in Adelaide early last year. He consulted with the surgeon beforehand but no fees were discussed. Because he was privately insured he was covered for the cost of the bill up to the Medicare Schedule fee, but anything above that had to come out of his own pocket.

Although he paid his surgeon's bill, which was above the Medicare Schedule fee, he baulked at paying extra for the anaesthetist's when he'd had no real contact with him beforehand and hence no real opportunity to discuss fees. "I had no control over what these unseen people charge," he said.

Ultimately the anaesthetist took Mr Smith to court, where the magistrate said, "If the fee exceeds the Medicare Schedule fee the privately insured patient on the highest table will have to personally pay the gap between the Medicare Schedule fee and the actual fee. The patient should be made aware of this. If he or she is not, then, in all the circumstances here, it is my view that the law should imply that the Medicare Schedule fee is a reasonable fee. It is the fee that the law will imply into the contract unless there is some agreement to the contrary."



The South Australian branch of the Australian Medical Association considered an appeal, not against the finding that the doctor should have informed the patient about fees but against the decision that the Medicare Schedule fee is reasonable. However, it decided not to go ahead, claiming "a minor civil claim decision" does not set a precedent.

This probably isn't the end of the matter. No doubt the AMA is waiting for a stronger case where it hopes to set a precedent more to its liking. However, the advantage is with the consumer at the moment and you should find your doctor a bit more up front about the fees he or she's proposing to charge. It may in fact become a legislative requirement, with the Western Australian health minister already considering it.

Recyclable toner cartridges

BOOMERANG CARTRIDGES DESIGNED TO COME BACK

WITH many laser printers you don't have to mess about adding toner when it runs out. The whole toner cartridge is replaced instead, which includes some of the printer's imaging parts. That makes printer maintenance easy, but if you throw away the used cartridge, you're contributing to Australia's growing landfill problems and you're wasting resources and money — up to $15 per cartridge.

That's how much a NSW cartridge manufacturer with the apt name Boomerang Imaging Supplies pays for returned Boomerang cartridges. According to the company, Australia currently imports about one million new cartridges a year, worth about $100 million. When dumped, they create about 150 tonnes of landfill.

Boomerang is hoping to change this picture. It's encouraging companies and individuals to return used cartridges to its Sydney factory, where it manufactures laser printer toner cartridges from recycled and new components.

Boomerang says its cartridges are suitable for about 80% of laser printers sold in Australia and are guaranteed to meet original equipment manufacturers' design specifications. They're likely to cost 30-40% less than an imported cartridge.

Boomerang also accepts other companies' cartridges, as long as they've been used once only. For an IBM cartridge, for example, the company currently pays $7; the price varies depending on type of cartridge and how it's collected.

Boomerang recently launched the 'swap shop', a computerised vending and collection machine for laser printer toner cartridges, combined with an electronic retail catalogue. The idea is that cartridges don't have to be packaged or stored; individuals or companies can simply buy and return cartridges on site when they need them. Designed for use in corporate or government offices and in semi-public places such as post offices, copy shops or supermarkets, some of these machines are currently being tested at various sites in Sydney.

Boomerang returnable toner cartridges and 'swap shops': aiming to reduce landfill at a cheaper price.

DID YOU KNOW?

Some British researchers (with nothing better to do, presumably) claim to have found proof that Friday 13 is unlucky. They studied traffic accidents on each Friday 13 and the preceding Friday 6 over a period of three years and found less traffic on average but more injuries on the Black Fridays. Maybe the cautious stay at home and only the devil-may-care venture out, or maybe there's something in it after all.

...MEANWHILE BACK AT THE RESEARCH CENTRE
WE'VE BEEN SACKED FOR WASTING TAXPAYERS MONEY
YOU KNOW WHAT TODAY IS?
IT'S FRIDAY THE 13TH!
THIS IS SO GREAT
mik

FLAMING NUISANCE

EVERYONE knows small children are at risk of burns, but if they're wearing flammable clothing they can suffer horrific injuries from what should really be just a quick lesson not to touch hot things.

For children's nightclothes there is a standard (AS1249) which says all nightclothes in sizes 0 to 14 must carry one of three labels:

- LOW FIRE DANGER.
- STYLED TO REDUCE FIRE DANGER.
- WARNING HIGH FIRE DANGER KEEP AWAY FROM FIRE.

Standards Australia, which looks after the standard, has a leaflet that explains the labels and gives tips on how to avoid burns. The most important is to keep your child away from fires, heaters, candles, matches and anything that causes clothes to catch fire. However, eternal vigilance is impossible, so it's good advice to choose clothes which are close-fitting and made from non-flammable material such as wool. Check for the fire danger labels even if you think a garment looks fairly safe. If you make your own clothes, try to follow the same advice regarding fabric and style.

For more information contact any office of Standards Australia or the Federal Bureau of Consumer Affairs, which enforces the standard's requirements.

- The Consumers' Association recently did a trial on the effect of reducing the temperature of your hot water system as a means of trying to reduce the damage done to children from scalding. See page 20 for the findings.

Can you help?

WE WOULD LIKE to increase the number of people who help us with our pre-publication price checks, store surveys and interstate buying in all capital cities and regional centres. You will be paid for your time and reimbursed for any costs incurred, such as car mileage, cost of goods, etc.

- **Price checks:** We carry out price checks nationally before each magazine is published. Checkers go to stores close to their homes and record the prices of particular brands and models of a product. These checks usually take around three hours to complete. You might be asked to do a price check three or four times a year.
- **Store surveys:** National surveys are carried out periodically to help our market researchers. The surveyor is asked to go to local stores to list information on various products available.
- **Buying:** It is sometimes necessary for us to purchase goods outside Sydney. We contact a relevant member of our national buying panel, and he or she buys the goods and despatches them to us in Sydney.

If you would like to help, please send us your name, address, home and work phone numbers and any fax number we can contact you on, if applicable. Write to: **National contacts**, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204; mark your envelope 'Private and confidential', and we will contact you with further information. Please indicate if you are interested in helping with price checks and/or surveys and buying.

Thank you for your help.

FINANCIAL ADVICE

WANT SOME FREE ADVICE? The financial advice industry is one fraught with problems for people who have some money and are unsure what to do with it. In July the Australian Securities Commission announced it would move to tighten licensing and training requirements for the country's 30 000 investment advisers, following a lot of complaints about poor or ill-motivated advice.

We are also concerned about some practices in this industry and the quality of the advice people are receiving in an increasingly complex and bewildering financial environment. For many people, their life's savings are at stake.

We need volunteers to test the quality of the financial advice available from a range of companies throughout Australia. If you have some money to invest (it could be super, savings, an inheritance, proceeds from selling your home, etc) and are unsure where to put it for optimum safety and earnings, let us know by September 20 if you'd like to take part in our trial. Participants will be asked to visit three different advisers (we'll pick up the bill), explain their circumstances and report back both on the advice they receive and the quality of the service.

The individual financial plans will then be assessed by a panel of industry and independent experts. Naturally your details will be kept confidential in any article CHOICE publishes as a result of the survey.

If you'd like to be one of our volunteers, write to **Financial advice**, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, by **September 20**. Please include your phone number. Mark envelope 'Private and confidential. Attention: Ross Neilson'.

Cleaner buses

A 'gas bus': kinder to the environment and commuters alike.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT GEARS UP FOR THE OLYMPICS

THE same gas that's used domestically for cooking and heating is powering some commuter buses on several routes from Sydney's south west to the city centre. The buses run on compressed natural gas (CNG), which produces lower levels of greenhouse emissions and only about a tenth of the smoke (particulates) of standard diesel vehicles.

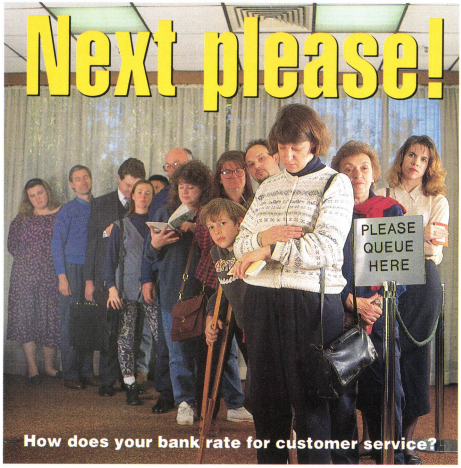
"By providing a quality product that can get people out of their cars, the gas buses can play a two-fold role in helping clear Sydney's air," said NSW Transport Minister Bruce Baird at the launch.

Apart from having a lower impact on the air we breathe, the buses are quieter — both inside and out — than diesel-fuelled models, and the initial response of drivers and commuters is positive. The buses are equipped with improved seating, larger windows, in-floor heating and air conditioning with an ozone-benign coolant. According to Sydney Buses, the new models have 'kneeling' hydraulic suspension systems, which can lower the steps and make getting onto the buses easier for elderly or less mobile passengers. People with vision problems will appreciate yellow markings on steps and handrails.

Ten CNG-powered buses started operation in Sydney in June and close to one new one each week will be delivered over the following year. "And an additional 200 buses are planned to be introduced in the following four years to boost Sydney's public transport system in the lead-up to the Olympic Games," Mr Baird said. This makes it the largest single order of CNG-powered vehicles — more than 900 are currently running throughout Australia, including cars, buses, trucks and forklift trucks.

On the route from Strathfield to the Olympic site at Homebush Bay, Sydney Buses is also trialling another alternative fuel — diesohol. According to manufacturers this mixture of diesel and ethanol produces fewer greenhouse gases than standard diesel. Sydney Buses and Action Buses in Canberra are currently assessing the environmental benefits of the fuel and are monitoring its effect on the converted diesel engines and fuel efficiency.

Next please!



How does your bank rate for customer service?

DESPITE THEIR PROMISES AND marketing gimmicks, the 'Big Four' banks — ANZ, COMMONWEALTH, NATIONAL AUSTRALIA and WESTPAC — are not delivering the most satisfactory customer service. According to our survey on consumer satisfaction with bank service, they are being outdone by many smaller and regional banks. For instance, the COMMONWEALTH — the people's bank — appears to be doing a relatively poor job of pleasing its customers: it was named as one of the worst three banks in five out of nine of the service criteria we assessed. In terms of overall satisfaction with service, the ANZ was ranked second-last of all the banks for which we have information.

What do you think?

Some time ago we asked CHOICE readers what stories they would like us to publish about banking. The quality of the customer service provided by banks was by far the most popular topic. *"I have not yet been to a bank that gives good service,"* wrote one subscriber. *"Voluminous amounts are spent on public relations when the reality at the 'coalface' for the small consumer is quite contradictory,"* wrote another.

In the light of these strong perceptions about how banks treat their customers, we decided to assess consumer satisfaction with bank service. Over 1400 people replied to our survey, which set out to assess satisfaction with the over-the-counter services offered by banks and with the electronic services they offer.

Survey respondents were asked to tell us about a particular visit to the bank: the number of people in the queue, how long they had to wait in line, time taken to complete the transaction and perceptions about the efficiency and manner of counter staff.

We then asked them a series of questions about the use of automatic teller machines (ATMs) and their experiences with Electronic Funds Transfer at Point of Sale (EFTPOS). They told us how easy they found ATMs to use, problems they have encountered with these machines, and the most liked and least liked features of ATMs. Similar questions were asked about their use of and satisfaction with EFTPOS.

Thank you

We'd like to thank the subscribers who took part in our survey on bank service. Your co-operation and support enable CHOICE to publish articles that reflect what consumers really think about services like banking.

THE RESULTS:

Paperwork

Respondents were asked if preparation for their transaction, like obtaining and filling out forms, was convenient. Most customers were happy with the forms and facilities supplied by the banks, though a number of the smaller banks were given higher ratings than the four major players. The BANK OF MELBOURNE, STATE BANK OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA and ST GEORGE received the highest ratings; the COMMONWEALTH, STATE BANK OF NSW and ADVANCE were at the bottom of the list.

Stand in line

The number of people waiting in a queue can give customers a lasting impression about a bank's commitment to service. The number of people standing in line varied widely from bank to bank. The banks with the shortest queues were, once again, small or regional banks, although one of the smaller operators, the R&I BANK of WA, had the highest average number of people waiting in a queue, along with the COMMONWEALTH. The other major banks were middling performers in terms of queue length.

We also asked survey respondents to record the length of time they spent standing in line to be served. Some lucky people reported not having to queue at all when they last visited their banks. The longest wait recorded was 27 minutes, by an ANZ customer. Such a long wait might suggest ANZ had a valid reason for introducing its "strive for five" policy of paying $5 to customers who have to wait in line for more than five minutes. The longest wait recorded at five other banks was also 20 minutes or more. Once again, the three other big national banks are included in that list (see table). Does that mean ANZ's competitors should be offering their customers similar speedy service deals? Waiting such a long time in a bank queue is unacceptable. Many banks obviously need to place more emphasis on customer service by providing more counter staff at peak times.

However, our survey results also show that the *average* waiting time was less than five minutes; three minutes at ANZ branches. This figure shows the

ANZ's $5 deal for what it is: a marketing gimmick, much more likely to put a strain on the bank's counter staff than cause a drain on its profits. The campaign also makes serving fast the teller's primary objective, when his or her attention should be on serving best.

Time spent in bank queues

Bank (in order of longest wait)	Longest wait (minutes)	Average wait (minutes)
BANK OF MELBOURNE	10	2
METWAY	10	3
STATE BANK OF NSW	10	2
STATE BANK OF SA	10	3
ADVANCE	15	3
R&I OF WA	20	3
WESTPAC	20	3
ST GEORGE	22	3
NATIONAL	23	3
COMMONWEALTH	25	4
ANZ	27	3

Over the counter

What happened when the participants in our survey finally made it to the bank's counter? Most of our customers were visiting their bank to make a straightforward transaction — a deposit, withdrawal, payment or transfer. This probably explains why none of the transactions was judged to take an unacceptably long period of time. The four largest banks were faster at actually serving their customers than they were at processing them through the queue. However, the four banks with the shortest duration of transaction times were either regional or small operators.

According to the Finance Sector Union, there has been a massive drop in the number of customer service staff across all major banks in recent years, as a result of compulsory retrenchment programs. There have also been widespread cutbacks in training and administrative support for counter staff. The major banks are asking fewer employees to serve more customers, and faster. The result is increasing stress and anxiety levels for employees, according to the union.

Despite the pressures of counter staff's jobs, most people who responded to our survey found those at their bank to be courteous. For instance, 86% of COMMONWEALTH and R&I customers found staff to be either very or reasonably courteous, and other banks were rated even higher than this.

Survey respondents were then asked how easy it was to communicate with the teller. For instance, we wanted to find out if people with language difficulties were catered for or if noise levels or security screens hindered communication between the customer and the teller. No bank was rated particularly badly for ease of communication but, again, the four largest banks tended to have middling to low ratings.

Cash on tap

Turning to the use of and satisfaction with electronic banking services, our survey results show the most common reason for using an automatic teller machine (ATM) is to withdraw money. Somewhat surprisingly, bank customers appear to be making no more ATM than counter transactions each week, although most respondents found ATMs easy to use. Not surprisingly, older people had more difficulty using ATMs than younger.

Users of ATMs find them convenient because of their unrestricted hours and because there are fewer forms to fill in than when making an over-the-counter transaction, but they get very annoyed when ATMs run out of cash. Another common problem they have is forgetting their personal identification number (PIN). They are also concerned about the lack of security when using an ATM.

Shopping by card

Only half the people who responded to our survey are users of Electronic Funds Transfer at Point of Sale (EFTPOS) facilities. People aged 55 and over were less likely to use EFTPOS. Just over 90% of those who do use this service find it easy to use: they like being able to access their bank account directly at the time they're paying for shopping and the fact that its availability means they don't have to carry cash.

Most EFTPOS users said there was nothing they particularly disliked about the service. However, 20% of those who reported using EFTPOS said purchasing goods in this manner made it difficult to budget and keep track of their money.

If you're unhappy

So what can you do if you're dissatisfied with a bank's customer service? The first step is to lodge a complaint with the bank, but don't just phone the offending branch.

If you complain over the phone, there's a danger your complaint won't even be recorded, let alone followed up. The best course of action is to put your complaint in writing, and send your letter right to the top, to the bank's Chief Executive Officer.

If you feel strongly enough about the poor service you've received, the next step might be to close your accounts and take your business to another bank. This might be quite easy if you have a small number of straightforward accounts, but if you've got a mortgage or an overdraft for your small business, you may have to move your banking gradually, perhaps one account at a time. It's also important to compare interest rates and bank charges before making such a move.

CONCLUSIONS

Our big banks don't seem to put customer service first. In terms of overall satisfaction with the service offered, the two best banks were state-based organisations (see below for overall rankings). The NATIONAL AUSTRALIA did the best of the four biggest national banks — it was ranked sixth out of the 11 reported on in the survey; the ANZ was ranked tenth. It is obviously time for the bigger institutions to take a good hard look at their customer service practices. ❑

Which bank gives the best customer service?

The banks reported on in our survey are listed below in rank order for overall satisfaction with the customer service they offer. Numbers in square brackets are branches/agencies so you can see whether it's practical to use a particular bank in your state.

STATE BANK OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA
(NSW [2], Vic [1], Qld [5], SA [309], WA [1], NT [4])

BANK OF MELBOURNE
(NSW [6], Vic [513], Qld [1])

ST GEORGE
(NSW [244], Vic [32], Qld [10], ACT [7])

ADVANCE
(NSW [191], Vic [2], Qld [25], SA [1], ACT [22])

METWAY
(NSW [4], Vic [1], Qld [105])

NATIONAL AUSTRALIA
(All states and territories: total 1363)

STATE BANK OF NSW
(NSW [277], Vic [1], Qld [8], ACT [5])

COMMONWEALTH
(All states and territories: total 6217)

WESTPAC
(All states and territories: total 1454)

ANZ
(All states and territories: total 1538)

R&I BANK OF WA
(NSW [1], Vic [1], WA [409])

Source for branch/agency numbers: Reserve Bank of Australia.

Getting around

How do you rate the public transport in your area?

IF YOU ASK PEOPLE why they don't catch the bus or train to work the excuses come thick and fast. "They're too unreliable", "I'd have to change buses to get where I go so it takes too long", "They're too crowded and smelly", "It's not safe. My son got mugged on a train".

We sent out a survey to subscribers and asked them to rate the public transport in their area. Nearly 90% of respondents thought buses and trains were reliable and at least fairly safe, and roughly 80% thought they were comfortable. Around 90% said trains were fairly fast, and while buses fared worse with only 70% satisfaction with speed, it's still a respectable figure.

So why don't people use public transport more? Transport gurus come up with all sorts of theories for why people choose different ways of getting around. Western Australian transport analysts Peter Newman and Jeff Kenworthy believe it's related to population density in cities. The more spread out a city is, the less efficient and comprehensive public transport becomes and the more likely people are to take the car rather than the bus. At the same time, the more effort you put into building roads and freeways to accommodate these cars, the more a city sprawls.

This may be the answer for the gurus, but for the average person in the street it probably boils down to, "Why should I catch a bus or train?" The answer is to keep our cities sustainable and to help save the environment. It may be easier to jump in your car than wait around for a bus but you'll use up more resources and create more pollution. A fifth of carbon dioxide emissions (which contribute to the greenhouse effect) come from road transport.

The aim of this article is to let you know what public transport is available in your area and what you can expect from it if you haven't tried it for a while.

The survey

Questionnaires were mailed to 4000 CHOICE subscribers in the 30 largest cities and towns in Australia; from this we got around 1600 responses — many thanks to those who answered. They were asked questions about different methods of travelling and also how they rate the public transport in their area.

A different questionnaire was sent to as many transport providers in the same cities and towns as we could find. They were asked questions about what services they provide, how much they charge, etc. The response rate from the smaller operators was quite poor, perhaps not surprisingly, but many thanks to those who did respond.

The table on pages 10 and 11 includes information from both surveys. It's not complete, but it gives you an indication of what you can expect in the way of public transport in 18 Australian cities and towns.

Way to go

As most public transport surveys in Australia find, the most popular mode of transport was the car. Over 90% of respondents had made some sort of car journey in the week prior to the survey, and the average distance travelled by car was around 210 km during that week.

We asked everyone who answered the survey what they thought the advantages and disadvantages of the different forms of transport were, whether they used them or not.

The main advantage of the car was convenience, with speed and flexibility also featuring prominently. The main disadvantage was perceived as the cost, followed by parking difficulties and traffic jams.

Around 2% of our respondents had made a motorbike trip. Their advantage was seen as manoeuvrability (getting around traffic jams), with the disadvantage not surprisingly being the danger aspect.

Two thirds of our respondents said they had walked for part of their journeys, on average around 10 km a week, and 9% had used a bike at some stage, travelling an average 23 km a week. The biggest advantage of both by far was felt to be the health/fitness aspects, although a few people nominated cheapness and enjoyment as reasons.

Of the public modes of transport, trains and buses were the most popular (both around 17%), although the average distance travelled on trains was much longer: 125 km as opposed to 45 km a week on buses. Around 5% had caught a tram and 1% a ferry.

There were a few different advantages nominated for trains: speed, comfort (although a few people nominated lack of comfort as a disadvantage), cheapness and convenience. The main disadvantage was seen as unreliability, followed by lack of comfort and inflexible timetables. Convenience was the biggest advantage of buses, although several people nominated inconvenience as a disadvantage. The major perceived disadvantage once again was unreliability.

Reliability

While unreliability was seen as a problem for all modes of public transport by non-users, when we asked the people who actually use it to rate its reliability a different story emerged. A little over 10% of users thought buses and trains were unreliable, but around one third felt they were very reliable. Trams didn't fare so well, with a third of users calling them unreliable.

As part of our transport provider questionnaire we asked what percentage of services ran within five minutes of the schedule. Not all operators knew this, but the majority of answers were in the 90–98% range. If you travel by car you have to compare this to the number of times you get caught in traffic jams and arrive later than you expected. A document from CityRail (which operates trains in the Newcastle-Sydney-Wollongong region) compares the reliability of peak-hour services in France, Japan, the UK and USA, which ranges from 88% to 97% within five minutes of the schedule (or 92% within one minute in Japan).

It seems most operators in Australia are providing quite a reliable service, but those hovering around the 70%–80% level need to lift their game a bit (see the table overleaf). Suggested improvements from our subscriber survey include more services and more express services, better timetables and better maintenance — though we didn't ask how much more they'd be prepared to pay for these.

Speed

According to Newman and Kenworthy, the average speed of traffic ranges from 39 km/h in Sydney to 48 km/h in Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth. Buses, trams and ferries travel at around half this speed, but trains are right up there with speeds averaging from 33 km/h to 45 km/h. In our survey we also asked about speed and the results were much the same as Newman and Kenworthy's. However, Transperth (which runs trains, buses and ferries in Perth) said its trains travel at 58 km/h. This is reflected in the responses from our Perth subscribers, who were very happy with the speed of their trains.

The most popular suggestion about what change would improve the speed of public transport was more services during peak hours, and several people thought longer bus-only lanes would help speed up buses.

Comfort and safety

Around 80% of our public transport users thought the transport they used was reasonably comfortable, although only a few described it as very comfortable. Suggested improvements were better seats with more leg room, better air conditioning, more services so there's no

Public transport

City (in population order)	Population (1991 census)	Modes	1 Services per capita per year	2 Patronage	3 Running hours	4 Average fare ($)	5 Weekly t
SYDNEY	3 097 956	Bus, train, ferry	0.7	140	22	0.92	✓
MELBOURNE	2 761 995	Bus, train, tram	1.2	80	21	0.82	✓
BRISBANE	1 145 537	Bus, train, ferry	2.0	70	21	1.03	✓
PERTH	1 018 702	Bus, train, ferry	2.4	60	21	0.57	✓
ADELAIDE	957 480	Bus, train, tram	2.8	70	20	0.67	
CANBERRA	272 151	Bus	3.9	90	18	0.62	✓
NEWCASTLE	262 331	Bus, train, ferry	1.8	60	24	0.67	✓
GOLD COAST	256 275	Bus	0.5	20	24	0.80 *(A)*	✓
WOLLONGONG	211 417	Bus, train	0.4	15	22	1.21	✓
CENTRAL COAST	197 128	Bus, train	0.4	20	23	0.99	✓
HOBART	127 134	Bus, ferry	6.3	90	no data	0.64	
GEELONG	126 306	Bus, train	1.5	no data	17	no data	✓
TOWNSVILLE	101 398	Bus	0.1	7	12	1.11	✓
DARWIN	67 946	Bus, ferry	1.8	40	18	0.51	✓
BALLARAT	64 980	Bus	2.1	no data	15	no data	✓
BENDIGO	57 427	Bus	1.5	no data	16	no data	✓
ROCKHAMPTON	55 768	Bus	1.5	15	12	0.64	✓
SHEPPARTON	30 511	Bus	1.1	no data	9	no data	✓

no data Either no response to this question from the transport provider or an insufficient number of responses from subscribers to get a valid rating.

(A) Adult fare for a 2 km journey.
(B) Percentage of trains running within three minutes of scheduled time.
(C) Buses were rated good, trains very good.
(D) Buses (and trams in Melbourne) were rated OK, trains good.
(E) Buses were rated OK, trains very good.

need to stand and more frequent cleaning.

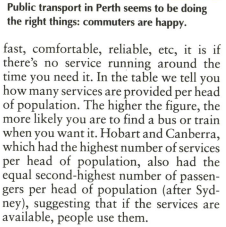
Our question about safety was a general one that covered safety in accidents as well as freedom from attack. Forty per cent of respondents considered public transport very safe, with only 10% considering it at all unsafe. The most common suggestion to improve safety was more police or security guards. However, for buses 40% of users wanted seatbelts installed as a safety measure. A few people also suggested better driver education would help.

Cost

There were mixed feelings about the cost of public transport. Around two thirds of our users thought it was low — but a third thought it was too high. According to the transport operators, the price for a short (2 km) trip will probably cost you between 70 cents and $1.40. A longer (10 km) trip will be around $1.30 to $2.80. Most operators also sell discount tickets, such as weeklies, for regular commuters. If you don't need to travel in the rush hour you can also get off-peak specials in some places.

Services

The frequency of services in your area is another factor to consider when using public transport. It doesn't matter how



Public transport in Perth seems to be doing the right things: commuters are happy.

fast, comfortable, reliable, etc, it is if there's no service running around the time you need it. In the table we tell you how many services are provided per head of population. The higher the figure, the more likely you are to find a bus or train when you want it. Hobart and Canberra, which had the highest number of services per head of population, also had the equal second-highest number of passengers per head of population (after Sydney), suggesting that if the services are available, people use them.

What do we want from public transport?

The results of our survey show most public transport users are quite happy with the services they are getting, but if people who don't currently use public transport are to be won over it seems what they want most is frequent and reliable services. Judging by the satisfaction of Perth commuters in our survey, it looks like the Western Australian capital is doing all the right things. Its fares are among the lowest in the country and it has recently been expanding and integrating the parts of the system to make it faster and more efficient.

A recent Industry Commission report into urban transport said the cost of public transport to taxpayers is high and the quality in terms of reliability and frequency is poor. However, while some of its recommendations for reform are sensible and necessary, many seem to be based on economic rationalisation, particularly the desire to introduce more competition. Public transport needs to be co-ordinated so that coverage can be increased and services timed so that people don't have to wait an eternity for connections — but it's inevitable that in a 'competitive' marketplace, everyone will concentrate on the most profitable areas and ignore the rest. There's more to public transport than simple economic equations — factors such as equity of access, urban sustainability and environmental protection. Ultimately everyone will suffer if they're forgotten. ❑

6 Multi-mode tickets	7 Advance purchase tickets	8 Claimed services on time (%)	9 Reliability rating	9 Comfort rating	9 Safety rating	9 Speed rating	City (in population order)
	✓	92-98	good	OK	good	OK/good *(D)*	SYDNEY
	✓	72-93	OK	OK	good	OK/good *(D)*	MELBOURNE
		87 *(B)*	good/very good *(C)*	good	good	OK/good *(D)*	BRISBANE
	✓	95	very good	good/very good *(C)*	good	OK/very good *(E)*	PERTH
	✓	75-99	good/very good *(C)*	OK	good	good	ADELAIDE
applicable	✓	99.8	good	good	good	OK	CANBERRA
	✓	95-98	good	OK	very good	OK	NEWCASTLE
applicable		no data	no data	no data	no data	no data	GOLD COAST
		90	OK	OK	good	OK	WOLLONGONG
		no data	good	good	good	OK	CENTRAL COAST
		no data	no data	no data	no data	no data	HOBART
	✓	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data	GEELONG
applicable	✓	80	no data	no data	no data	no data	TOWNSVILLE
	✓	99-100	no data	no data	no data	no data	DARWIN
applicable	✓	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data	BALLARAT
applicable	✓	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data	BENDIGO
applicable	✓	95	no data	no data	no data	no data	ROCKHAMPTON
applicable	✓	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data	SHEPPARTON

Most of the figures in this table come from the transport providers themselves. Questionnaires were sent to transport operators (public and private) in the 30 largest cities and towns in Australia. The results were used along with figures from other sources such as the *City Transit Yearbook*. We didn't get a complete response from the operators so we can only report on 18 centres, and in the interests of consistency we've only used figures for government operators in the capital cities. A different questionnaire was mailed to CHOICE subscribers in the same 30 cities and towns. Their responses formed the ratings in the last four columns. Population figures are from the 1991 census.

1 Services

A service is a trip from A to B, so if a train runs from Perth to Fremantle and back 10 times a day it is providing 20 services per day for people along that route. If a bus service runs back and forth along the same route eight times a day as well, there are 36 services in total. We added up the total number of services provided each year and divided by the population of that city to give an indicator of the level of public transport available to residents of that city. In capital cities, private services have not been included, but in other places they have.

2 Patronage

This is the number of trips made by individuals each year, divided by the population of that city. It gives an indication of how well public transport is patronised in that city. With the exception of Sydney and Melbourne there seems to be quite a strong connection between services available and patronage.

3 Running hours

This is a measure of the time between the first service in the morning to the last service at night. In the bigger cities, services run virtually all day, breaking for a short while in the wee hours of the morning. However, in Shepparton, Townsville, Ballarat, Bendigo or Rockhampton you wouldn't want to stay out too late and hope for a bus ride home.

4 Average fare

This figure is calculated by dividing the total income from fares by the total number of passengers. It is probably a bit lower than the price you'd normally expect to pay for a single journey because it takes into account concession fares for children and pensioners and discount fares on weekly tickets, etc. It also includes journeys of all lengths.

5 Weekly tickets

As their name implies, weekly tickets allow you to travel on the one ticket for a week, usually for a discount. You can also often buy monthly, quarterly, or even yearly tickets.

6 Multi-mode tickets

In places where you need to use more than one mode of transport to make your journey, it helps if you can buy a single ticket to cover the full journey.

7 Advance purchase tickets

It saves time and fiddling with small change if you can buy a special ticket or book of tickets before you travel, and use it/them for a certain number of trips, validating the ticket when you get on.

8 Claimed services on time

In our questionnaire to the transport providers we asked, "What proportion of your services run to within five minutes of the scheduled time?" This is the figure given in the table. Not all modes are equally reliable, so a range has been given for some cities. Canberra's claimed 99.8% reliability isn't reflected in subscribers' ratings; rather than acheiving an 'excellent' or 'very good' rating such a percentage would suggest, Canberra subscribers just rated it 'good'.

9 Reliability, comfort, safety and speed

Our subscribers were asked how they would rate four factors (reliability, comfort, safety and speed) for the public transport in their area. We didn't get enough responses to talk about all modes of transport in all cities. Our results include buses and trains in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide as well as trams in Melbourne. Canberra and Newcastle ratings refer to buses only, while the Central Coast and Wollongong ratings only refer to trains.

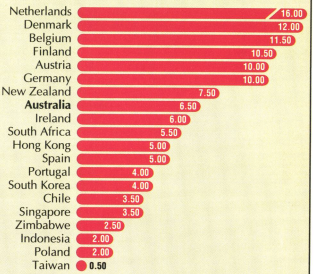
SHOPPING AROUND

In case you're wondering why countries like the UK, USA and France aren't always represented in Shopping Around, it's because — although we always ask them for the information well ahead — sometimes they don't get it back to us in time for publication.

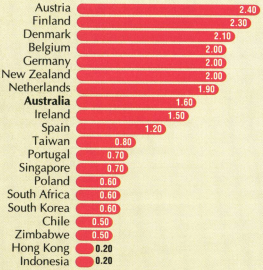
TRANSPORT

Petrol (per litre)

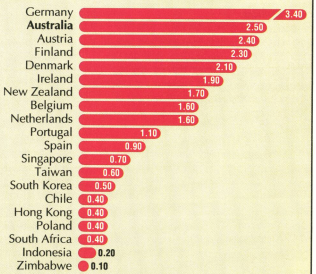
Cab fare (per 5 km)



Train fare (per 5 km)



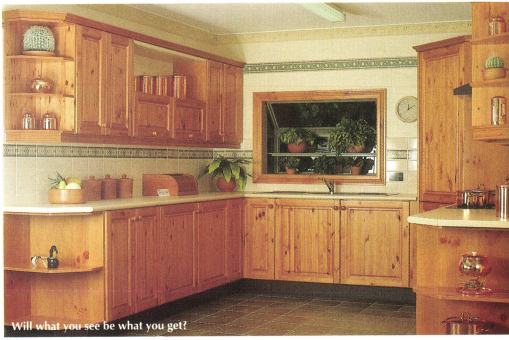
Bus fare (per 5 km)



All prices in Australian dollars (to nearest 10 cents), based on exchange rates quoted in the *Australian Financial Review*, May 10, 1994.

Buying a kitchen

The path to a sparkling new kitchen is paved with dubious discounts, poor product information and potentially high financial risk. Here are our tips to keep you in control.



Will what you see be what you get?

ONCE UPON A TIME it was a big deal buying a new stove or fridge for the kitchen. Now it seems fashionable to replace the whole room every five or 10 years! What are the traps when you play this sort of big money game? We asked our readers to write in with their experiences and, combined with our own research, have some good tips to pass on.

In this first section we'll deal with the issues — where to go, what are the problems, how to save money. On page 18 we'll take a more detailed look at the various components — the benchtops, carcases (the cupboard minus the door), fittings, and so on.

Getting started

Where should you begin this daunting and expensive task? The first thing is to see what are the possibilities. Go to the showrooms, look in magazines, ask your friends for their stories.

If your experience is like ours you'll find the sales staff in showrooms know (or will tell you) very little about the options and their cost. In most cases we found we were unable to get answers to such basic questions as: What does this cupboard cost? What does this benchtop cost per metre? What discount can you get on appliances? What are the differences between competing brands of laminate?

A spokesperson for Laminex Industries, supplier of various laminates, confirmed the difficulty they find in getting technical information into the showrooms. It could be ignorance (we met a couple of showroom 'hostesses' — as they're known in the trade — who had been in the job only two weeks), but it appears to have more to do with getting a foot inside your door with the vital home appointment.

Showroom staff should be better resourced to answer basic questions on price (at least the relative cost of various finishes or 'average kitchen' prices) and the suitability/durability of alternative materials. Staff should have reference materials, consumer factsheets or even a short video to handle these initial inquiries.

"The designer can help you with that," was an all too frequent response to our questions.

The designer comes to call

"I'll have to be honest with you ... my mind's not on the job. I've got to get to another customer by midday. I'll get back to you." This is a quote from a designer during an in-home visit. (By the way, he was never seen again.)

Getting quotes for a fitted kitchen is a time-consuming business. They each take between one and two hours. What happens? A designer makes an appointment to meet you at home — during or after business hours. He or she asks questions to work out your needs, and suggests ways of dealing with particular design problems (such as too many doorways into the kitchen, or fitting in a table).

Using a tape measure, the designer will take down the dimensions of the room and, after the consultation, will prepare a detailed plan for the new kitchen. Up to this point it should have cost you nothing (though it's wise to check first).

Sometimes there will be pressure to sign on the spot, before the designer leaves your home. In the past there have been reports of problems getting the designer to leave without a finalised sale. If

Thank you to our readers

We'd like to thank those readers who responded so well to our request for information about personal experiences buying a kitchen. This type of input helps CHOICE address your real needs.

this happens, walk to the front door; if that fails phone the police.

Big name? Small name?

Is it best to sign with a major kitchen company? Many of the readers who wrote to us were treated very professionally by their chosen kitchen supplier, ranging from large companies to small local businesses. Others experienced ongoing annoying troubles. Here's one person's list:

■ The benchtop was scratched, the cooktop was set at an angle and had to be moved, a power point was mounted at an angle, shelves were missing, the plumber was called back three times to fix leaking taps, the dishwasher connection leaked, the kitchen sink did not have a hole cut for the waste disposal unit, the under-sink bin would not fit inside the cupboard. (JB, Forestville, NSW.)

A major kitchen company was involved in this drama. Choosing a 'big name' will not always guarantee a smooth job since such companies often rely on contract tradespeople.

Other important concerns of our readers were a lack of time and/or talents to do the job themselves, and a fear of getting less than a perfect finish. Many commented that whereas a professional job would add value to the home, a less perfect one might even adversely affect value. Hence there was a willingness to pay large sums to secure a glossy outcome. It therefore came as no surprise to us that most of these readers, having reached this decision, were then satisfied with the final appearance of their new kitchen.

The benefits of custom design

There are other aspects to consider when choosing a company. All kitchen companies work to standard-sized cabinets and base their designs around them. If these don't fit neatly into the dimensions of your kitchen there may be subtle or overt pressure to direct you to accept gaps or filler panels which may look unattractive or waste useful storage space.

Often a smaller company can be better able to customise the design as its workshop is not streamlined to focus on volume manufacture to standard sizes.

For example, if you want cupboards right up to the ceiling, one company will just make its cupboards taller, while another will deal with the problem by stacking an extra row of separate carcases on top. This adds substantially to the cost, and may still leave a gap of some sort. Existing features — such as windows, doors and built-in furniture — create similar problems.

■ **Tip:** If you find the larger kitchen companies are being inflexible, use the Yellow Pages to find a smaller company with its own workshop.

Planning your kitchen

When planning your kitchen design, bear these things in mind:

■ **Work space:** There should be plenty of bench space, preferably in more than one location.

■ **Setting-down space:** Make sure there is clear bench space next to the cooktop or stove so you can rest hot pots and pans when moving them on or off.

■ **Lighting:** Don't be left working in a shadow. Task lights can be placed to shine on the sink, cooktop and other work areas. Lights can be fitted inside and underneath the upper cupboards.

■ **Ventilation:** A good rangehood will help remove airborne grease, humidity and odours. Vent it to the outside.

■ **The right appliances:** A major kitchen renovation is a time also to consider the condition and appropriateness of your old appliances. You can save money and be kinder to the environment if you look for energy-saving and water-saving dishwashers, fridges and cookers. Check for energy 'star' labels on the front of appliances, or turn to the relevant CHOICE reports. A four-year index is included in the June 1994 issue.

■ **The working triangle:** How ergonomic is your design? Working in the kitchen can be made more efficient if you think of your cooking area, sink and fridge as the three points of a triangle: if you keep them close together you save a lot of running from one end of the room to another.

Get some graph paper, measure your kitchen dimensions, and draw up the room. Allow for the door and window spaces. Have a go at seeing how the various pieces can fit together. Here's a guide to some common dimensions:

■ **Widths of appliances:** upright stove (540 mm or 600 mm), wall oven cabinet (600 mm, 700 mm, 750 mm), dishwasher (600 mm); standard fridge/freezer (640 mm to 690 mm).

INCENTIVES TO BUY

"I was excited when I read of 30% off normal prices for that month — I had not yet accepted the quote from that company but had been planning to do so. I saw this as a way of reducing my kitchen quote by a further $3400. On the day after reading the advertisement I rang the consultant and accepted the quote subject to an amended price.

"The phone call which followed was far from satisfactory. I was informed my quote already had a 25% discount and therefore the company could only offer me a further 5% reduction. At no time when I was discussing the original quote had I been told that it included a 25% discount or in fact any discount whatsoever." (EC, NSW.)

Another reader who had approached several companies reported he was "always given 20–25% discount whether or not a promotion was advertised".

Yet another was offered a 'tonight only' special price if she signed on the spot. Although she didn't sign, the company rang her two weeks later and told her she could still have the special price.

Our researcher was told by a prominent company's salesperson that he could have the kitchen at the 'retail price' or at the much cheaper 'factory direct price'; the salesperson couldn't explain the reason for the difference.

So, just what is a discount or special deal worth in the kitchen building industry?

Attractive advertisements appear regularly. When a new fitted kitchen can commonly cost between $6000 and $14 000, it's tempting to follow the trail to the best-sounding offer.

However, being suspicious by nature, we dropped in (anonymously) on showrooms of several Sydney companies offering special deals. We found in most cases the 'hostesses' didn't even mention current special deals and discounts. Here are two examples:

■ "Save up to 35% — includes free installation."

■ "Free dishwasher with every kitchen purchased for this month only."

Doesn't the left hand not know what the right hand is discounting?

'Incentives to buy' are built into the costing. Profit margins are low in this industry (around 10% on average according to Michael Hall, Chairman of the National Kitchen and Bathroom Association), so don't expect a free lunch when buying your kitchen. Cut to the bottom line — ask for their 'best price' — and always ask about 'this month's special 30% discount' (it can't hurt!).

Michael Hall maintains the industry position is that, "The customer should know whether there are discounts or free inclusions before they leave the showroom."

■ **Floor cabinet widths:** 400 mm, 450 mm, 600 mm, 800 mm, 1200 mm.
■ **Other floor cabinets:** corner pantry (1045 mm x 1045 mm, or 1100 mm x 600 mm): set of drawers (400 mm, 450 mm or 600 mm wide).
■ **Wall cabinet widths:** 400 mm, 600 mm, 700 mm, 900 mm.
■ **Benchtops:** commonly 600 mm deep.

Paying for it — too much too soon?

If the kitchen isn't installed to your satisfaction, how much of the price will you be holding back as an incentive for the builder to remedy any defects? It may be as little as 5%. Progress payments may go like this:
■ 10% deposit on signing the contract.
■ 20% on 'check measure' in the home.
■ 65% to 80% on delivery of materials.
■ The final 5% or 10% on completion of installation.

There are two issues here: the buyer is left with very little to bargain with should there be a defect or installation dispute, and is carrying the financial risk that the builder might go bankrupt before delivering the goods.

Michael Hall, Chairman of the National Kitchen and Bathroom Association (NKBA), justifies the pricing structure by saying that tradespeople are expensive, there are numerous government regulations to follow and warranties to provide, there is a cost of co-ordination, and there is a cost associated with accommodating last-minute changes requested by the customer.

The NKBA would like to see consumers pay higher deposits — in fact around 25% to 33% of the total price up front. They justify this on the basis that much of the kitchen is customer-specific and made to size.

However, given the high failure rate of businesses in the industry, we would oppose any such increase in the absence of a payment system which protected the consumer should the company cease trading. In contrast, the UK Kitchen Specialists Association is a trade body which runs a service to refund the consumer's money if the supplier goes bust after the deposit has been paid but before the kitchen has been installed. Couldn't we have a similar scheme here?

Contractual hazards

A clear contract will help resolve a dispute before it escalates. But some terms put the consumer in the back seat:
■ "The supplier agrees that physical possession only of the above quoted goods will be transferred to the customer upon the delivery of them to the customer's premises ... Upon the default of the purchaser to pay the full price after the supplier has supplied and/or completed installation of the above quoted goods, the supplier has the right to re-enter without notice the purchaser's premises uninhibited and remove the said goods." (**Nouvelle** contract)

We think this goes too far. On the particular contract we saw the customer had already paid 95% of the total price before installation — surely the goods should belong to the customer at that point! And the "uninhibited" right of re-entry is really going over the top (what if payment was being withheld due to a genuine dispute over an aspect of the job?).

Another condition to be aware of is this one:
■ "Where installation is required by the supplier and the above quoted goods are unable to be installed (through no fault of the supplier) at the time advised by the customer, subsequent installation may be subject to a further charge for travelling and rescheduling." By comparison, the Knebel contract makes it clear the cost of such a mishap will be borne by the customer only if the appointment was missed due to the fault of the customer.

Don't treat so-called standard terms lightly. It pays to read them carefully. Also ensure your contract documents specify what you want precisely. Here's a clue to what can go wrong:
■ "Because I told each kitchen company the same thing I wrongly assumed I would get the same job. For example, the bottoms of my drawers are just bare timber, which means I have to be particularly careful at the sink so as not to splash water down the cupboard as it could make it swell. This would not happen if they were edgestripped all the way round. The tops of my wall cabinets are also bare. And although I believed I had asked for pot drawers I got normal, smaller drawers." (LH)

Make sure your contract and order forms show dimensions of all cupboards, doors, panels and benchtops, specify materials, nominate handle design, type of base (plinth or adjustable legs), and clar-

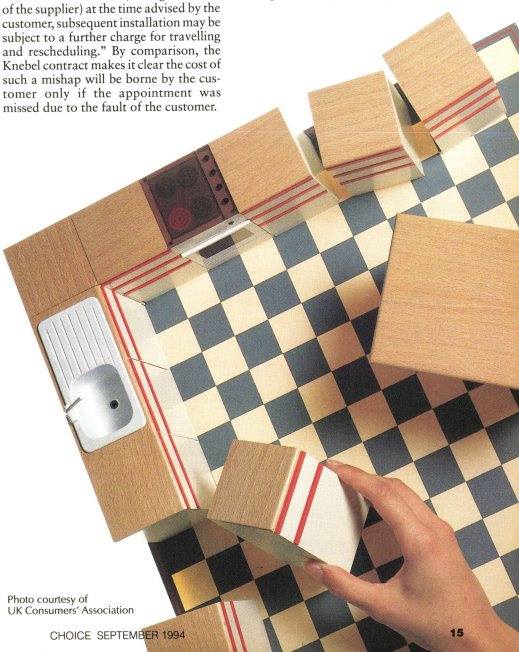


Photo courtesy of UK Consumers' Association

ify who is supplying the appliances. There should also be dates for delivery, commencement and completion, a schedule of payments and, ideally, a statement that you own the components upon delivery to your address.

Installation

Installation isn't the point where the kitchen company makes its money. This usually accounts for 5% to 10% of the overall cost. How low can it go? We came across one company which charges a rate of $50 to assemble and fit each cabinet; this price includes cutting and fitting of the associated benchtop. Try bargaining.

Similarly, pulling out your old kitchen cupboards is not a great expense. It's a point where you can save money by doing it yourself, but what happens if the new kitchen isn't quite ready to go? This happened to one of our readers, who was left with no kitchen for several days.

A kitchen can be installed in as little as one to two days, so if convenience is important try and find a company which will accommodate your needs. Again there's no guarantee:

■ "Had everything fitted perfectly the job would have been finished in one day. With bits and pieces to be changed it took another fortnight for it to be perfect." (CM, Moonee Ponds, Victoria.)

It pays to be present to supervise throughout the job and to make decisions as problems arise.

Warranty

A new kitchen brings with it a bundle of warranties offered by the various component suppliers and installers. The hinges may have a lifetime warranty, for example, while the laminates, carcases and workmanship have their warranty days numbered.

Kitchen companies contacted by CHOICE offered warranties ranging from three to 10 years. Take this into account when making your choice.

But, more importantly, will the company still exist when you come to claim on your warranty?

Going broke

Customtone is the latest high-profile kitchen company to cease trading. According to Michael Hall of the NKBA, "The kitchen industry has a high bankruptcy rate. This is because there are low barriers to entry — it's inexpensive to start operations. There are more than 2000 kitchen companies in NSW alone. But many of these companies fail because they don't understand the ongoing costs involved."

SAVING MONEY?

WHEN CHRIS wanted to replace his aging kitchen his first quote was for $10 000. He thought there was a lot of padding in this figure, so set about doing the job himself.

Looking through the Yellow Pages phone book he found a company which would supply him with the necessary parts: the benchtops, carcases and doors. At the end of the day it cost Chris $6000 to buy and fit much the same kitchen — a saving of $4000.

Chris, however, points out some of the problems with doing it his way:

■ "It took longer than I thought to pull out the old kitchen cupboards — around one day."

■ "It was a nightmare getting the cupboards all level. I spent nearly one whole day fiddling with the adjustable legs and a long spirit level before everything lined up."

■ "A couple of years after completing the job I noticed the hinges were beginning to pull out of the carcase walls. I'm not sure if it was the fault of the materials or workmanship."

■ "Because I installed the kitchen myself there is no warranty on the job. People should bear this in mind."

What is the worth of a warranty if the company goes broke? Nothing. What can you do to protect yourself? For a start, don't be misled by a fancy showroom — the company may be behind in its rent!

■ Find out how long the business has been operating.

■ Check with your local consumer affairs/fair trading office about complaints or whether the company is under investigation.

■ When you visit the showroom, are there other customers being served or placing orders?

■ Try to negotiate a lower deposit.

■ Be suspicious if the company has a promotion offer which seems very generous. On the right is a Customtone advertisement offering a generous 30% discount; within a month the company had shut its doors.

How can I save on costs?

Here are our tips for saving your hard-earned money:

■ The basic kitchen materials can be bought from a components supplier, either assembled or 'flatpack', with all screws, precut pieces, shelves, hinges and handles in the pack. You can install it yourself, or pay a carpenter rather than use the kitchen company.

■ If buying flatpacks, you may be able to save a hefty delivery fee by making one or more trips in your car, with the benchtops on the roof racks.

■ Take out your old kitchen yourself. This could save a few hundred dollars.

■ Do you have to throw away everything from your old kitchen? For example, you could buy new benchtops and doors for existing cupboards. Timber doors will cost around $75 each and laminate doors around half this. Check measurements carefully. If the old cupboards are mere chipboard (not HMR particleboard — see page 19) it's probably better to ditch the whole lot and start afresh with superior materials.

■ You'll need an electrician and possibly a plumber and tiler — you could employ them yourself. But if you're the boss, watch out for disputes and co-ordination problems:

"The plumber cut a cavernous hole in the wall to access the pipes. He didn't patch it as he was 'not a plasterer'. The cabinetmaker then installed a cupboard over the top — 'I didn't cut the hole so I'm not fixing it up!' he said." (A country reader, NSW).

■ Focus on economy of design. For example, say you have a 1200 mm length to fill with cupboard space. You could achieve the same amount of storage space in one of three ways:

— 1 x 1200 mm cabinet = $300.
— 2 x 600 mm cabinets = $400.
— 3 x 400 mm cabinets = $500.

Installation costs increase with each additional cabinet too.

Each of these alternatives to using a kitchen company will involve you in more time and responsibility — that's the trade-off for saving money. And remember there'll be no warranty on the work you do yourself, though there will be on work carried out by licensed tradespeople.

DESIGNING KITCHENS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The Independent Living Centre in Sydney has a display kitchen full of great ideas to fit a kitchen to the needs of someone with a disability.

For example, for those in a wheelchair:

- Lower the bench height.
- Create knee space under the cooktop and sink.
- Raise the height of kickboards to allow for wheelchair footplates.
- A pull-out pantry will bring stored goods within reach.
- Install a wall oven with a slide-away or side-hinge door.
- A U-shaped layout is most desirable for your kitchen.

If you have difficulty holding things, try these design ideas:

- Use D-shaped handles rather than knobs on cupboards and drawers.
- Build a pull-out shelf in front of the microwave oven.
- A glass cooktop allows you to slide pots off the heat and onto the bench or sink without lifting.
- Install lever taps or 'half-turn' taps (fully off to fully on in half a turn).

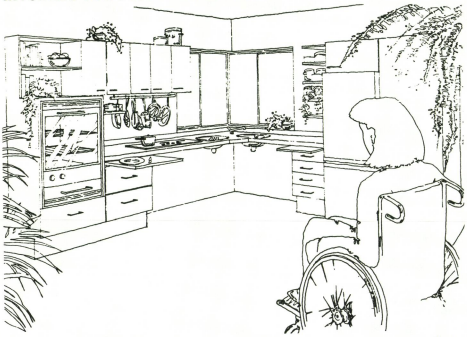


Illustration courtesy of the Independent Living Centre, NSW

For more information, contact the Independent Living Centre in your state. An excellent video on kitchen planning is available for hire or sale. Here are the phone numbers: (06) 205 1900, (02) 808 2233, (07) 394 7471, (08) 276 3455, (003) 34 5899, (03) 254 5400, (09) 382 2011.

Very generous promotional offers may be a clue to company difficulties: within a month of this ad appearing, Customtone had closed down.

LIMITED OFFER !!
1993 PRICES
NOW MORE AFFORDABLE THAN EVER BEFORE!
Australia's most successful kitchen company.
20 years and 40,000 installations. The most experienced and creative designers using the very latest materials and finishes to create your perfect kitchen. Complete after-sales service and the Customtone Guarantee of performance. Talk to Customtone and inspect the kitchens at...
CUSTOMTONE
AUSTRALIA'S BEST QUALITY KITCHENS
SYDNEY HOTLINE ph: 648 5144
MIRANDA - 591 Kingsway ph: 525 0887
BILGOLA - 1 Barrenjoey Rd ph: 918 1144
WILLOUGHBY - 125 Willoughby Rd ph: 648 5144
BANKSTOWN - Cnr Stacey St & Punchbowl Rd ph: 708 0666
SHOWROOMS OPEN 7 DAYS 9am to 5pm

Continued on next page

COMPLAINTS STATISTICS

SINCE 1991 there have been more than 600 formal complaints about kitchen companies lodged with consumer affairs and fair trading offices in NSW, Queensland, Victoria and WA (these are the only states for which we could get figures). Most frequent complaints concerned:

- Quality of work.
- Delays in fixing problems after completion.
- Failure to follow design specifications.
- Failure to supply nominated goods or services.
- Dubious discounts and pressure selling tactics in the home.

If you're not getting satisfaction from your kitchen company, first get in touch with the manager. If this gets you nowhere, lodge a written complaint with your state's building licensing authority and the NKBA (or the Cabinet Makers Association if you are in WA).

- WA only: Cabinet Makers Association of WA (Inc); phone (09) 381 7300. The association will assist consumers to resolve disputes with its members.
- Elsewhere: National Kitchen and Bathroom Association. The NKBA does not itself handle disputes, but says it will act on complaints against its members.

You'll have a wide choice of components. Here are our tips about the problems and how to ensure you're getting the quality you've specified.

- Check all tradespeople are licensed.
- Check out the company with consumer affairs or the office of fair trading.
- Height-adjustable legs and a removable kickboard allow access for cleaning spills and pest control underneath cupboards.

1 DRAWERS

Check to see you're getting painted (powder-coated) steel runners (or complete steel sides) and a self-closing action.
Tip: The drawer should shut by itself if left sticking out a couple of centimetres.

2 FITTINGS

Most hinges are solid metal these days. The old 'plastic bowl' type should be avoided.

Knobs and handles can complement or destroy the look of your kitchen. You may know the design you want, but have you thought about their precise placement? Do you want them in the centre or to one side? High or low?
Tip: Add this detail to your sketch plan or you could find a 'D' handle, for example, placed vertically when you wanted it horizontal. It's hard to change once holes are drilled in the doors!

3 LAMINATES

Are all laminates the same?

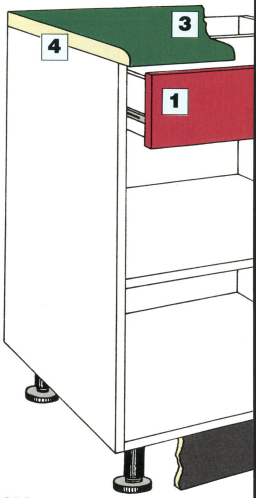
Rolled-edge laminates are thinner than straight-edged sheets (around 0.8 mm compared to 1.2 mm). This may conceivably mean a loss of toughness in the thinner laminate, but it's probably not a significant issue in the kitchen.

The two types are identical in construction, being roughly 70% paper with various resins applied under high pressure and at high temperature.

Apart from this we can see no reason to choose one brand of laminate ahead of another. The more important issue is whether to have a gloss or flat finish. A gloss finish will show scratches more clearly and the colour may go out of the pattern along the scratch line.
Tip: A 'crystal' or textured finish conceals scratches better.
Tip: Take a sample of the laminate you want and scratch it with a knife. Compare this to a sample with a matt or flat finish.

Laminates may appear to be completely stain-resistant but this is not the case. To be on the safe side, anything caustic or with a strong colour (even fruit juices or cleaning chemicals) should be cleaned up immediately, not left to sit on the laminate. They are not completely heat-resistant either.

Timber edges on a laminate benchtop mean you've got a join which, if damaged, can let water in. Buckles and bags can scratch the timber edge, whereas rolled laminate or other surfaces would resist.



4 BENCHTOPS

■ 'Solid timber' benchtops are often made of timber blocks glued together.
Tip: If the lacquer is not applied properly, or it gets scratched, water may penetrate and split the timber blocks. It's not as forgiving as laminate.
■ Granite can stain by absorbing cooking oil.
■ Stainless steel is very fashionable, but smears as soon as it's touched, ruining the sleek effect. Don't buy it if you're obsessive.

Spilt liquids can be expected to run over the edge of the benchtop and underneath. Extra protection is offered if the bench is sealed underneath or there is a drip point along the lower edge.
Tip: In the showroom, look under the benchtops.
Tip: Watch out for hollow benchtops. Some companies build up the edge to cover the fact the top is not solid.
Tip: Some companies have been known to use a mix of boards in their benchtops — for example, to use moisture-resistant particle board around the sink cutout but a non-resistant particleboard elsewhere. Check the benchtops before they're fixed to the cupboards (see *Carcases*, right).

■ Insist on high-moisture-resistant (HMR) particleboard for benchtops and carcases, and HMR or moisture-resistant MDF board for doors (see below for details).

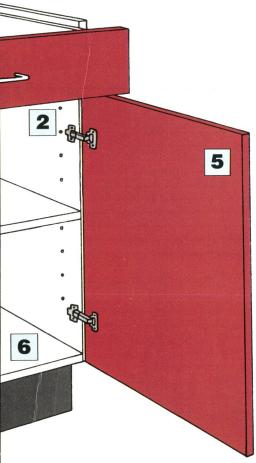
■ Are shelves held firmly in place, or can they tip up unexpectedly?

■ Drawers should have metal runners or sides.

■ Carcase should be joined by dowels and glue or screws — not staples.

■ Check all edges are sealed.

■ Get what you think you're paying for: if the doors are timber, are they solid, ply or veneer?



6 CARCASES

The old days of blown chipboard cupboards are largely over, thanks to the development of high-moisture-resistant (HMR) particleboard. Ensure that HMR will be used for all carcases and benchtops (get it in writing, in your contract).

Tip: You can recognise HMR by a green dye or fleck throughout the particleboard: look at the end grain. If the kitchen is completely assembled you can check for HMR by taking off a hinge and looking in the hole, or checking in the benchtop cutout made for the cooktop or sink.

If it's not what you ordered and paid for, get the company back (or apply to your small claims court/tribunal).

HMR adds about 7–8% to the bill, so it's an area where a shonky company might try to cut costs.

The particleboard in carcases may be covered with timber veneer, laminate or melamine finish. (Melamine is a finish achieved using paper impregnated with resin, which is then placed onto the particleboard and applied by heat. It will damage easily if knocked, and is not nearly as tough as laminate.)

Carcases can be assembled in a variety of ways, from doweling to stapling or screwing. Stapling is cheaper and less secure than the other two.

You may be interested to know that Laminex Industries is introducing a moisture-resistant particleboard with an added fire-retardant chemical. As many house fires start in the kitchen it's a product worth considering — it may help prevent the fire getting out of control before you've had an opportunity to reach for the extinguisher. You'll be able to recognise fire-retardant board by a red fleck in the particles.

5 CUPBOARD DOORS

Doors are an expensive part of the kitchen furniture but they are subject to significant variations in quality. Consider these points:

■ **Vacuum-wrapped** doors are made using a thin sheet of plastic which is wrapped around particleboard. It can be routed and shaped to give rounded edges. We've heard of these problems:

— Any particle of dust caught under the wrap will show.

— The colour may vary where the wrap has been stretched — over mouldings, for example. This may be less of a problem now than it used to be.

— If accidentally cut, the door may show a split where the plastic film has opened up.

■ **Timber** is a natural product and subject to great variation. If you want every door and panel to look much the same in terms of colour and woodgrain patterns, solid timber may disappoint. Don't expect the kitchen company to provide a perfectly matched set of doors.

Tip: Some 'solid' timber doors actually have veneer or ply centre panels. This is not necessarily a problem, but make sure you get what you want.

A timber kitchen is more expensive than a laminate or vacuum-wrapped one — and the price of good timber is rising rapidly. It is a scarce resource and, for some timbers, you may face a lengthy wait. Some kitchens sold as 'blackwood' are actually using Queensland sally wattle, which is a more brittle timber.

Tip: Ask to see a sample of lacquered timber before ordering, as it will only show its true colour when the lacquer is applied.

■ **Polyurethane** is a fashionable, high-gloss painted finish for your doors. It's also one of the most expensive treatments.

Tip: Watch out for an 'orange peel' or rippling effect in the paint; it's expensive to get a smooth finish as it requires hand-rubbing between coats. A satin-finish polyurethane is now available.

■ **Laminate and particleboard.** Apart from HMR (see *Carcases*, above), the other acceptable type of particleboard for doors is called medium-density fibreboard or MDF. It has a grainy appearance which looks better than HMR where the surface will be shaped or routed to give the look of mouldings (such as on doors). It is not as water-resistant as HMR, though you can get a water-resistant version called MR-MDF (recognisable, in some instances, by a green line running through the board).

Some like it hot

Hot water in the home causes a disturbing number of scalding injuries every year — especially to small children. We look at the results of a trial to test one possible solution: lowering the water temperature. Unfortunately, people quickly went cold on the idea.

"HOT WATER BURNS LIKE FIRE!" Alarming? It's meant to be. It's the slogan of a scalds prevention campaign, launched in July by the NSW health department. Every year hundreds of children throughout Australia are scalded by hot water in the home. The injuries are dreadful. Most need skin grafts, long periods in hospital and prolonged treatment — sometimes lasting years. The scars are often permanent.

One obvious approach to fixing this problem is simply to turn down the temperature of the hot water in your home. To test the feasibility of this, NSW Health commissioned CHOICE to carry out a trial designed to gauge the acceptability of household hot water lowered to a relatively safe temperature of 50°C. According to the department's research, the average in NSW homes is closer to 65°C and many systems leave the factory preset to heat water up to 70°C.

Unfortunately, the results of the trial were not encouraging for the proponents of this particular solution to the scalding problem, for one simple reason. With the system temperature lowered, the available hot water is used up more quickly by the same pattern of usage because you use more hot in your cold/hot mix to achieve the same water temperature. If you still take the same number of hot, strong and long showers, you'll quickly run up against the dreaded 'runout'.

This problem is particularly common with the types of system in this trial: electric continuous heating systems (which, once run cold, must reheat a whole tank from scratch) and 'type 1' off-peak systems (which reheat only once every 24 hours). With other types of water heater such as off-peak 'type 2' (which reheat twice a day) or gas systems, the 'runout' problem may well be greatly reduced.

What we found

Our trial set out to test the acceptability of lowered hot water temperatures in 63 households in the Sydney metropolitan area. The households had an average of four occupants and all included at least one child under the age of five.

The average daily hot water consumption of these households was approximately 180 litres, or slightly under 50 litres per person — a reasonable rule of thumb if you're trying to work out what capacity system you need. (Add another 50 litres per hot-water-using appliance.)

The bad news for the 'turn it down' approach was that these households averaged only one hot water 'runout' every 100 days before the trial, but after the temperature was adjusted down to 50°C this figure shot up to one every four days. Continuous heating systems ran out more often than off-peak both before and after the adjustment. At the lower temperature they averaged almost once every day! This is a reflection of the fact that off-peak systems require larger tanks because they have to store more hot water — in this trial they averaged 282 litres, while the capacity of the continuous ones averaged only 88 litres.

About 80% of the householders in our study felt the lower-temperature water wasn't hot enough. Of the households with a dishwasher using the hot water supply, around a quarter believed its performance had suffered as a result of the drop.

The bottom line for our trial, however, lies in the fact that only 10 of the 63 households decided to stick with the lower temperatures at the end of the two-week test. Put another way, over 80% of people who took part in our trial were sufficiently unhappy with their not-so-hot water supply to request it be turned back up, even though they had small children in the house and had been made aware of the dangers of scalding accidents.

How great is the danger?

The danger from scalds is most acute for the very young and some elderly people. Scalds account for around 60% of all burn injuries appearing in our hospitals. Most injuries happen to under two-year-olds, who are active and curious about everything but lack the cognitive development to associate hot taps with danger. If no one in your house fits these descriptions, you might feel the danger presented by hot tap water is slight.

However, if you do have small children or even occasional care of them, the dangers are stark. Though scalds account for only a small percentage of child injury cases, they are the third leading cause of hospital bed days among children — an indication of the severity of the injuries. Child deaths from scalding are uncommon, but not unknown.

Tap water scalds — 80% of which occur in bathrooms — are usually worse than other types: they typically cover larger areas of the body, cause more 'full thickness burns' (where the whole thickness of skin is permanently damaged) and require more skin grafts, days in hospital, etc. NSW Health figures show over 40% of such injuries are inflicted by bath taps and another 40% by the bath water itself. Showers, sinks and other taps make up the remainder.

Temperature is obviously the crucial factor determining how dangerous your bathroom water is. At 50°C, third-degree burns (where the skin is damaged beyond repair) take at least five minutes. You can be sure a child will let you know what's happening well before this, giving you plenty of time to intervene. As the temperature rises, this critical rescue time decreases exponentially. At 54°C it takes about 35 seconds for an adult, but only 10 seconds for a child. At 60°C it's down to five seconds for adults and just one second for a child. At 70°C, common in Australian homes, adults will sustain this level of injury in a second and children virtually instantaneously: in around a quarter of a second.

Doctors in the field point out that these injuries are every bit as bad as fire burns; any full-penetration scald will cause scarring and the treatment itself is "long and painful".

What are the options?

One conclusion that can be drawn from our trial is that very few of the households had much spare capacity in their systems. This is shown by the fact that an average temperature drop of 13°C caused more than a twentyfold increase in the frequency of 'runouts'. Note that the runout problem will not be as bad for

Find out how hot *your* water is with NSW Health's 'Hot Water Temperature Card'.
You can get one free by writing to The Better Health Centre, 162 Blues Point Road, North Sydney 2059 (fax (02) 955 5196) before November.
HOT WATER
TEMPERATURE CARD
Warning.
60°C (140°F)
A third degree burn may occur in 5 minutes.
Danger.
A third degree burn may occur in 10 seconds.
A third degree burn may occur in 1 second.
60°
HEALTH

temperature reductions less than this and any reduction equals an increase in safety.

One solution, then, would be to increase the size of the tank. Clearly, this would be an expensive measure for those whose system is currently working perfectly well, but for new home owners/builders or those replacing worn out or broken systems, we can suggest that purchasing a little extra capacity should enable you to take advantage of the vastly improved safety of 50°C hot water without the inconvenience of running out. If you reduce the tank temperature from 60°C to 50°C, you will need roughly one third more tank capacity to supply the same amount of 40°C water to the tap — for example, if your present tank is 150 litres, you'll need a 200 litre replacement.

If this seems a prohibitively expensive or unfeasible option (many systems are sited in places — like under kitchen benches — that simply do not allow replacement with a bigger tank), there is a whole range of other measures you can take to stop dangerously hot water reaching your taps, regardless of the temperature in your system tank.

■ Thermostatic mixing valves control the outlet temperature by mixing incoming hot and cold water supplies to regulate the outflow to a set temperature. Their big drawback is cost: several hundred dollars.

■ Tempering valves can either be adjustable to a maximum temperature or set and locked at a given, safe temperature. They can be placed near the tank so as to control all hot water in the house or positioned so as to regulate only the hot water going to the bathroom, leaving, say, your kitchen sink and dishwasher water unaffected. They sell for around $90.

■ Child-resistant taps are obtainable for around $30 each and some childproof doorknob covers are also suitable for use with bath taps to prevent children turning them on. Be aware that, as children grow up, they can learn to operate these devices — they may not stop your unsupervised five-year-old from turning hot water onto your two-year-old, for instance.

■ For mixer taps two new types of outlet shut-off valve that recently came onto the market may represent the most cost-effective anti-scalding measures available. They use different types of technology, but both function by snapping shut if the water temperature rises above a safe level (between 43 and 49°C). This can happen very quickly if you — or your toddler — turn on the hot supply to your shower, basin or bath mixing tap without the cold or in the event the cold water supply fails for some reason.

According to the makers (Rye Australia and Reliance Manufacturing Company [RMC]), both types reduce the flow to a trickle almost instantaneously, then automatically reset themselves once safe conditions are reinstated by cool water running through them.

A good feature of these products is that you can install one for each outlet requiring safety measures, without resorting to lower temperatures at taps that don't. They come in versions for bath, basin and shower, are designed for do-it-yourself installation and can, if you wish, be removed and taken with you if you move.

The recommended retail prices for Rye Australia's valves are: Flowgard (for basins) $30, Bathgard $50 and Showergard $40. At the time of writing RMC

was planning to release its Anti-Scalding Device at $19.95. Both should be available from hardware stores and plumbing merchants.

We are planning to test these products soon to let you know how they perform.

Do-it-yourself temperature

The majority of gas hot water systems on the market come with a user-adjustable thermostat, enabling you to set the desired temperature yourself using a thermometer or something like the 'Hot water temperature card' being distributed by NSW Health as part of its campaign (see page 21). Owners of gas systems who have small children might like to experiment with lower system temperatures. Remember, any reduction makes your hot water that much safer.

Very few electric systems have this facility. The Australian Standard for electric domestic hot water systems specifies a minimum setting of 60°C; this doesn't apply to gas systems. Thermostat controls are available for electric systems, but they have to be fitted and set by an electrician for an all-up cost of around $70. If you want to alter the setting, you'll have to call the electrician back, for which you can expect to pay another $35 or so each time. You probably won't want to do too much experimenting under these circumstances.

We would like to see all manufacturers offer users adjustable controls similar to those available on gas systems — at affordable prices. The Rheem company has a new 'top-of-the-range' electric system with one.

Until they do, for electric systems the most practical and cost-effective approach may be to maintain relatively hot water in the system and employ some of the options outlined above to ensure it is delivered to bathroom taps at a safe temperature. ❑

HOT TIPS FOR YOUR CHILD'S SAFETY

HOT WATER SCALDS are some of the nastiest, most painful and most preventable injuries that can befall young children. The following advice may seem like simple common sense, but many of the horrific scalds passing through Australian casualty wards would never have happened if these basic precautions had been observed.

■ Never leave a child alone in the bathroom: not even for a few seconds while you answer the door or phone. A third-degree or 'full thickness' scald takes less than one second with water at 65°C. Wrap the child in a towel and take him or her with you. When you're not in the bathroom, keep the door locked.

■ Don't use the child to test the temperature. Children's bath water should be no more than 40°C. Check it with your own hand. If it feels hot to you, it's way too hot for a child.

■ Always turn the cold on first and mix the hot in. Do the reverse when turning taps off. Running cold water last through a mixer tap prevents burns both by cooling the metal spout (itself a potential hazard) and preventing a rush of instant hot water when the tap is next turned on. Never leave hot water running by itself near a child.

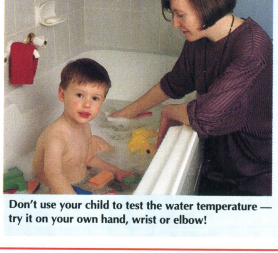
■ Install child-resistant taps. These use a similar 'push and turn' mechanism to 'childproof' medicine bottle tops to greatly reduce the chances of children turning the hot water on themselves.

■ Install tempering valves, thermostatic mixing valves or outlet shut-off valves (see *What are the options?* on page 21).

If your child is scalded...

The following first aid measures can make a big difference to a child's suffering and recovery from scalding injuries.

■ Remove any wet clothing: it can retain heat and continue to burn.



Don't use your child to test the water temperature — try it on your own hand, wrist or elbow!

■ Immerse the scalded area in cold water for 30 minutes. This reduces the heat in the skin and prevents deeper burning. **Do not** use ice. Small children can quickly become dangerously chilled in iced water.

■ Keep the child warm. Wrap him or her in a blanket.

■ Get medical help: if the scald is larger than your palm or is on the face or hands, get the child to a doctor or hospital as soon as possible.

■ **Do not** use butter, oils or ointments to cover scalded areas. Never mind what grandma said, they keep heat in the skin and worsen the damage.

WHAT ABOUT LEGIONELLA?

ACCORDING TO FIGURES from NSW Health, only four cases of Legionnaires' disease suspected to have been caused by domestic hot water supplies have ever been reported, in the world (none in Australia). It contrasts this with the 150 serious tap water scalds in NSW alone, and over 400 Australia-wide, every year.

According to Caroline Marsh, who worked extensively on a 1992 report of the NSW Legionella Task Force, the legionella bug grows best in temperatures from 34–43°C and less readily as things get hotter. At 50°C it will still grow but at higher temperatures begins to die off. Very little can survive past 60°C.

Ms Marsh was at pains to point out that the risk from legionella in domestic hot water systems is "very remote". Aside from temperature, the continuous turnover of water in most home systems makes a dangerous build-up unlikely. Infection can only occur by inhaling the bacteria (you could safely drink it), and then only in an extremely fine aerosol. It is possible that this could be produced by some shower roses, but again, this risk needs to be seen in perspective.

In weighing this kind of health risk, it's a case of 'horses for courses'. A meeting of medical experts in 1993 concluded that water sitting in a home storage tank at 50°C presented "no repercussions in terms of infectious diseases", though it noted that certain "sub-groups of the population" especially vulnerable to infection (such as transplant recipients and the "immuno-compromised") might warrant special consideration. The general message was, 50°C is safe.

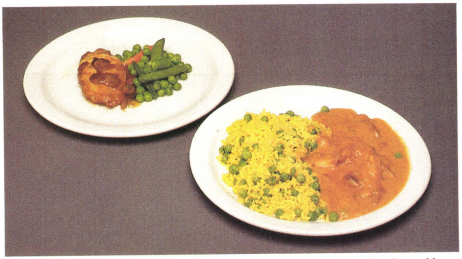
READY-COOKED FROZEN MEALS

They're a quick-fix solution if you don't feel like cooking, but do they really replace a home-cooked meal? We found most of the meals marketed as 'lean' and 'healthy' are low in calories, and they fared reasonably well nutritionally.

IT'S BEEN A LONG DAY AT WORK. You know when you get home you want to eat something straightaway — you're too tired to prepare an elaborate meal and too hungry to wait till it's cooked. On the way home you're tempted to buy anything that's ready-made, but what you'd really like is a home-cooked meal, not a take-away.

In supermarket freezers a vast array of complete, ready-cooked meals is competing with the ever-popular take-away foods. Over the last decade, the selection available has changed significantly with changing consumer eating habits and tastes. Meals such as **Pepper steak with a cracked peppercorn sauce** or **Indian style chicken curry with rice** are a far cry from the traditional frozen TV dinners of 'meat and three veg', which have to be heated in an oven and, when prepared, rarely look as appetising as the picture on the packet.

Many of the more 'modern' Asian, Italian or Mexican-style meals come in plastic cook-in pouches for quick heating in a microwave oven or in hot water. They are marketed at young, single people with a taste for gourmet food and an eye on their appearance. But do they really help you look after yourself? Are they really 'healthy', 'lean' or 'light' choices for your diet or does the term 'lean' only refer to the size of the meals?



Appearances can be deceptive. The Indian Style Chicken Curry from Lean Cuisine for Healthy Appetites (right) looks a more substantial meal than Lean Cuisine Breast of Chicken Marsala (left). But when we separated the meat from the sauce and weighed it, there were just six small, fatty-looking pieces of chicken weighing 42 g in the former, while the latter contained a lean-looking 'fillet' weighing 59 g.

'HEALTHY CHOICE' OF WORDS?

According to the Australian Food Standards Code, inclusion of the word "health" or "any word or words of similar import" in the name of a food is prohibited — be that on the label or in advertisements. What is important for good health is the *balance* of foods in the diet; no *one* product can be claimed to be healthy. So why is McCain allowed to market a **Healthy Choice** range of meals? We'll be following up this issue with the National Food Authority, which advises health ministers on food matters.

For our tests we chose frozen foods that are marketed as complete meals. We picked some of the popular beef, chicken, pasta and vegetarian varieties from the **McCAIN** and **FINDUS** brands, the only two which also offer a 'lean' or 'healthy' range of meals — **McCAIN** and **McCAIN Healthy Choice**, and **FINDUS, FINDUS Lean Cuisine** and **FINDUS Lean Cuisine for Healthy Appetites**.

TYPES OF MEAL

McCAIN frozen dinners are typical roast dinners consisting of meat and three vegetables. The 'frozen entrees' of the same brand are similar in size (some even weigh more than the dinners!) and are probably treated by most people as complete meals — some come with rice, pasta or vegetables as appropriate. The main differences are that they reflect a more modern influence and can be heated quickly in their cook-in plastic pouches.

Virtually the same applies to the **McCAIN Healthy Choice** range of frozen dinners and frozen entrees, but these meals are in addition claimed to be 97% fat-free and to have fewer than 300 calories (1255 kilojoules). All the ones we tested did contain less than 3% fat and were below the 300-calorie limit.

FINDUS has no traditional roast dinners. Most of its ready-made meals are of the more modern variety in cook-in pouches. Meals from the **FINDUS Lean Cuisine** range are claimed to be low in calories and fat and with reduced salt. We found all contained less than 3% fat and were indeed low in salt and calories.

Meals from the **FINDUS Lean Cuisine for Healthy Appetites** range are also relatively low in fat and salt, but are slightly larger and therefore also had more calories. Depending on the type of meal, a few were even higher in calories than some meals from the brand's regular range.

LOSING WEIGHT WITH FROZEN MEALS?

Although not marketed as 'diet' foods, the **FINDUS Lean Cuisine** and **McCAIN Healthy Choice** meals we tested are good choices as part of a balanced diet for people who want to lose weight. Compared with these brands' regular varieties, they're generally lower in calories, fat and salt, and contribute about 18-25% of a 1200-calorie weight-reducing

Ready-cooked frozen meals

Brand/type (in order of fat content)	Price paid ($)	Weight (g)	Fibre (g/serve)	1 Sodium (% of lower RDI – 920 mg)	2 Fat (g/serve
McCAIN Healthy Choice Beef & Black Bean Sauce	3.09	260	4	85	3
FINDUS Lean Cuisine Oriental Beef with Vegetables & Rice	3.72	245	2	65	5
McCAIN Healthy Choice Chicken in Light Mustard Sauce	2.99	230	3	45	5
McCAIN Healthy Choice Pepper Steak with a Cracked Peppercorn Sauce	3.65	310	7	45	6
FINDUS Lean Cuisine Traditional Lasagne	3.35	280	3	65	6
FINDUS Apricot Chicken Casserole & Rice	2.85	310	3	100	7
FINDUS Lean Cuisine Breast of Chicken Marsala with Vegetables	4.11	230	5	60	7
FINDUS Lean Cuisine Mild Vegetable Curry	3.43	290	6	55	7
McCAIN Healthy Choice Lasagne with Italian Style Vegetables	3.05	290	5	55	9
FINDUS Lean Cuisine for Healthy Appetites Ravioli with Tomato & Olive Sauce	4.05	400	7	70	11
McCAIN Sweet & Sour Chicken	2.98	350	4	125	12
McCAIN Beef Hot Pot	2.98	400	7	125	12
FINDUS Lean Cuisine for Healthy Appetites Indian Style Chicken Curry with Rice	4.12	400	8	75	13
McCAIN Roast Chicken Dinner	3.99	320	8	120	14
FINDUS Lasagne with Bolognaise Sauce	2.55	300	7	55	15
McCAIN Lasagne	2.75	400	5	145	18
FINDUS Macaroni & Cheese	2.69	400	5	85	26
FAST FOODS — FOR COMPARISON					
PIZZA HUT ½ Regular Supreme Pan Pizza	na	238	8	135	22
KFC ¼ TenderRoast Chicken, regular chips	na	268	8	100	31
RED ROOSTER ¼ Chicken 'n chips	na	295	8	105	37
McDONALDS Big Mac, regular fries	na	314	14	110	49
HUNGRY JACK'S Bacon Double Cheeseburger, regular fries	na	307	10	135	50

na not applicable

100%

diet per day. But they don't work miracles. They're low in calories mainly because of their small size, and as the size of the meals increases, so does the calorie content.

For an average, healthy young man or woman not on a diet, all the **FINDUS Lean Cuisine** and most of the **McCAIN Healthy Choice** meals we tested provide only 10% or less of their daily energy requirements. If eaten as a main meal — as they're intended, we suppose — they ought to provide about a quarter. For the normal 'healthy' appetite, these meals are simply too small, weighing in between 230 and 310 g.

The **FINDUS Lean Cuisine for Healthy Appetites** and the **FINDUS** and **McCAIN** regular varieties weigh at least 100 g more and provide a more substantial meal. They have accordingly more calories and would contribute on average about 15–18% of a 19 to 35-year-old's total daily energy requirement.

A BALANCED MEAL?

In a healthy diet, fat, carbohydrate, protein (macronutrients — that is, the major constituents of our diet) and vitamins and minerals (micronutrients, of which we need small amounts) are well balanced. Ideally we should derive more than half of our daily energy intake from carbohydrates, less than 30% from fat and about 15% from protein. In these terms, all of the **FINDUS Lean Cuisine, Lean Cuisine for Healthy Appetites** and **McCAIN Healthy Choice** meals were generally better balanced than most meals from these brands' regular ranges. They're not perfect, though. Most contributed too much energy from protein and some too little from carbohydrates.

The table indicates how much energy in these meals is contributed from carbohydrate, protein and fat. If your choice of meal is low or high in energy from one of these macronutrients, try to balance your daily diet with foods that make up for it. (For more information on a healthy diet, see *Healthy Eating* in the May 1994 issue of CHOICE.)

Apart from being well-balanced and not too high in fat and calories, the ideal diet should be high in dietary fibre — 30 g a day is recommended. Most of the meals we tested were rather low in fibre. On average they contained about 6 g, or only 20% of the suggested daily intake, but some had as little as 2 or 3 g. If you're eating these meals frequently, try to eat fibre-rich foods (such as bread, cereals, fruit and vegetables) the rest of the day, to balance your diet.

BETTER THAN FAST FOOD

In a microwave oven, the meals we tested take very little time to heat — between six and 10 minutes on average. Much less, in fact, than the time it takes to have a pizza delivered or to pick up a hamburger and chips. And nutritionally — especially if you eat convenience foods often — you're better off with these frozen meals than with traditional fast foods. In fact even if you ate two of some of them you'd still end up with fewer calories and a better-balanced meal. Most of the take-aways we tested for our April issue contained much more fat and sodium.

If you're on a calorie-reduced diet, eating the **FINDUS** 'lean' and **McCAIN** 'healthy' alternatives as a complete meal is a good choice. If you're healthy and not trying to lose weight, however, these products on their own don't provide enough substance as a main meal. You'd almost certainly have to add a salad and/or bread if you wanted to avoid nibbling on snacks or desserts an hour later.

Strangely enough you pay around $1 more for the smaller servings in the **FINDUS Lean Cuisine** range than for the regular dinners, while the **McCAIN Healthy Choice** meals cost slightly less than their regular counterparts.

3 rcentage of energy Fat	Carbohydrate	Protein	4 Energy (kJ/cal)	Brand/type (in order of fat content)
6		25	1230 / 295	**McCAIN** Healthy Choice Beef & Black Bean Sauce
54		27	1010 / 240	**FINDUS** Lean Cuisine Oriental Beef with Vegetables & Rice
44		35	960 / 230	**McCAIN** Healthy Choice Chicken in Light Mustard Sauce
47		32	1090 / 260	**McCAIN** Healthy Choice Pepper Steak with a Cracked Peppercorn Sauce
49		30	1060 / 255	**FINDUS** Lean Cuisine Traditional Lasagne
58		22	1240 / 295	**FINDUS** Apricot Chicken Casserole & Rice
27	45		920 / 220	**FINDUS** Lean Cuisine Breast of Chicken Marsala with Vegetables
61		14	1090 / 260	**FINDUS** Lean Cuisine Mild Vegetable Curry
44		22	1020 / 245	**McCAIN** Healthy Choice Lasagne with Italian Style Vegetables
61		15	1680 / 400	**FINDUS** Lean Cuisine for Healthy Appetites Ravioli with Tomato & Olive Sauce
66		13	2030 / 485	**McCAIN** Sweet & Sour Chicken
39	32		1480 / 355	**McCAIN** Beef Hot Pot
56		19	2030 / 485	**FINDUS** Lean Cuisine for Healthy Appetites Indian Style Chicken Curry with Rice
44	24		1640 / 395	**McCAIN** Roast Chicken Dinner
39	27		1680 / 400	**FINDUS** Lasagne with Bolognaise Sauce
49		21	2180 / 520	**McCAIN** Lasagne
38		19	2260 / 540	**FINDUS** Macaroni & Cheese
47	21		2540 / 605	**PIZZA HUT** ½ Regular Supreme Pan Pizza
32	23		2570 / 615	**KFC** ¼ TenderRoast Chicken, regular chips
34	21		3010 / 720	**RED ROOSTER** ¼ Chicken 'n chips
41		15	3540 / 845	**McDONALDS** Big Mac, regular fries
33		17	3670 / 880	**HUNGRY JACK'S** Bacon Double Cheeseburger, regular fries

1 Sodium

In salt — sodium chloride — it's the sodium which is implicated in high blood pressure. Consumption of between 920 and 2300 mg of sodium per day is recommended. Above the upper limit you may risk high blood pressure if you're susceptible; the lower limit is based on the minimum you need to be healthy. We've based the percentages on this lower limit. Some of these products supply 100% or more of this amount in just one small meal.

2 Fat

Aim for a diet that derives less than 30% of energy from fat. Any single meal that contains well over that percentage is going to make it harder for you to balance out to around 30% throughout the day. The meals are ranked in order of fat content per serve — from lowest to highest. Five grams of fat is about one teaspoon. The meals lowest in fat contained less than that; the one with the highest fat content had about five teaspoons, but that's still about half the amount of the bacon double cheeseburger and regular fries.

3 Percentage of energy

Fat Carbohydrate Protein

As well as keeping fat to less than 30% of the energy in your diet, aim to balance out protein and total carbohydrates to around 15% and 55% of the total respectively. Sugars (simple carbohydrates) shouldn't be more than 15%, with complex carbohydrate from foods such as vegetables, rice, pasta and bread making up 40% or more.

The graphs above show the percentage of energy coming from fat, carbohydrate and protein in each meal we tested, to give you an idea of their balance. The overall length of the coloured bars also indicates the size of the meal in kilojoules/calories, showing that a larger meal may contain more fat in real terms than a smaller one, even if proportionately it provides less energy from fat. For example, look at **FINDUS Lean Cuisine Breast of Chicken Marsala** compared with **McCAIN Sweet and Sour Chicken**. Fat makes up 28% of the energy of the former and only 21% of the latter, yet because the **Sweet and Sour Chicken** has more calories overall, it actually contains more fat: 12 g compared with the **Chicken Marsala's** 7 g, and so it has a longer orange bar.

4 Energy

An average 19 to 35-year-old man requires a daily calorie intake of 11 600 kJ (2770 calories); an average woman of the same age needs slightly less — 10 900 kJ (2600 calories). As a guide, if you're not on a calorie-reduced diet and are eating one of these frozen meals as a main meal, it should contribute at least one quarter of your total daily calorie intake; add bread and/or a salad if it doesn't.

DOWN TO DETAIL

The **FINDUS Lean Cuisine** and **Lean Cuisine for Healthy Appetites** meals we tested stated their sodium and calorie content down to a milligram or a single calorie. Although the regulations allow it, it's impractical to be so detailed on the label, as every extra pea or carrot slice added from batch to batch will slightly vary the stated nutrient claims. And yet it says on the packet of **Breast of Chicken Marsala with Vegetables**, for example, that it "contains 531 mg sodium" and "only 195 calories". We found it had 550 mg sodium and 220 calories. In other instances, the exact figures we measured were slightly lower than those claimed. These differences are hardly a cause of concern from a nutrition point of view, but if nutrient claims are made on processed food, they should be realistic. More general statements such as "contains less than 540 mg sodium" or "less than 250 calories" would be more practical.

LETTERS

Send your letters to **CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204**. Where possible, please include your daytime telephone number, as we may wish to contact you direct for more information or to discuss your comments and queries.

WATCH OUT

I wish to draw your attention to a practice which I believe should be discouraged by all possible means. Recently my wife purchased a Speedie 1200 Pro Turbo Hair Dryer for approximately $11. Along with the instruction manual, the product contained a leaflet headed, "Kambrook service and warranty information. Important: call now to register your warranty. Ring 0055 16311".

Later in the leaflet there is a page for postal registration stating, "If you are unable to register your warranty details by telephone, please detach and return this card within seven days to ..." When my wife rang the 0055 number she was subjected to a battery of consumer survey-type questions which went on so long she became quite impatient, but nevertheless continued to comply.

When the Telecom bill arrived we found it had cost us $3.52 to register the warranty on an $11 appliance. Buyers beware!

K Tupper
Rosanna, Vic

A spokesperson for Kambrook told us its 0055 warranty registration service had a few customer survey questions at the end which were entirely optional, though three quarters of callers stayed on the line to answer them. On hearing Mr Tupper's complaint, Kambrook refunded his $3.52. The spokesperson also said that in a recent recall of a Kambrook fan heater, the company was easily able to contact 80–90% of purchasers who had registered with the 0055 service, but less than half of those who had posted in their warranty cards.

Of course, you don't have to register warranties at all and companies are out of order if they imply that you must send in a card "within seven days". Proof of purchase entitles you to any manufacturer's warranty offered whether you register it or not. In some cases these warranties don't exceed the guarantees you have anyway under the Trade Practices Act.

THEY'RE CROOK ALL RIGHT

Congratulations on the January issue exposé of steering wheel locks. It is high time some of these devices were exposed for the silly toys they really are. As a result of the article, I have ditched my CLUB lock and purchased the recommended AUNGER Pro Lock APL-1020 model.

However, I do have one negative comment about the article. It is the same criticism I tossed at you after your previous article about these devices. Concerning the **KROOKLOK**, which you beat bare-handed, you refuse to tell us how you did it. By now you should have learnt that the thieves know more than you do and they certainly won't learn anything from you.

After reading the article I spoke to a friend who uses a **KROOKLOK**. I told him they were not very good but if he installed it as recommended in your article (between the closest spokes of the steering wheel) it would be safer. He asked me why and, frankly, I was unable to tell him, so basically he didn't take much heed. A couple of weeks later another friend demonstrated to me the simple technique of defeating the **KROOKLOK**. It was so simple and quick, I was quite shocked at how useless this device really is.

Instead of living under the illusion that demonstrations will give secrets away to thieves, show the public just how quick and easy it is to beat some of these devices. Show them up for what they really are. Manufacturers will then be forced to lift their game because a wary public won't be fooled into buying the stuff.

T Lewis
Castle Hill, NSW

While we're glad to show consumers that most of these locks are useless, we can't justify demonstrating car theft techniques. Imagine how you'd feel if the thief who took your car learnt how to do it in CHOICE. We think letting people know we easily defeated these locks with simple tools, some in a few seconds, is sufficient warning. Watchers of the ABC's ***The Investigators*** *program, which followed up our story, might have been amused to see a representative from the makers of the* **CLUB** *lock make an extravagant wager based on his belief that we were wrong. We think he believes us too, now.*

SAVE MONEY ON HEALTH INSURANCE

Regarding private health insurance (CHOICE, May 1994), there is one aspect that is not widely understood. If one travels abroad, membership can be suspended for that period, saving perhaps hundreds of dollars. Insurance does not usually cover costs incurred overseas, so the money is wasted otherwise.

My wife and I were abroad for three months last year. Suspending our health insurance saved us more than the cost of travel insurance for our trip. I only learned about this by chance; my fund doesn't advertise it! You simply produce your ticket and passport a few days before departure. Cover is suspended until you return, when you reactivate it by again producing your passport.

Your readers may not be aware of this. The same applies to ambulance cover. The saving, all in all, can be considerable.

C B Mayor
East Hawthorn, Vic

We haven't asked every health insurer if this is true for all funds, but it's certainly worth checking with yours if you'll be travelling overseas for any length of time.

CONSUMER BOOKSHELF

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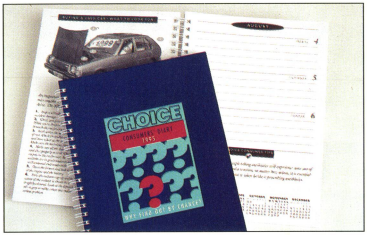

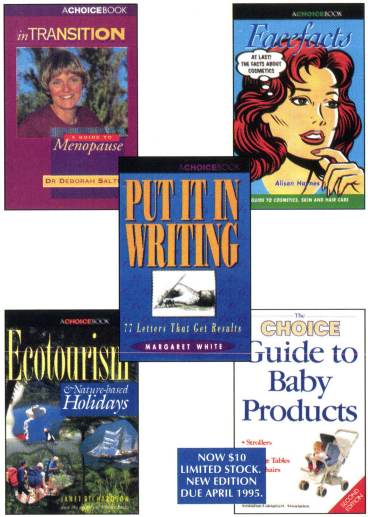

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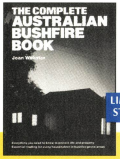

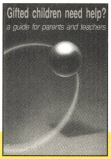

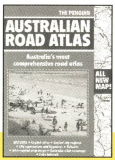

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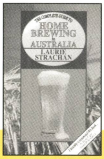

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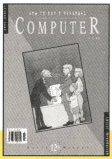

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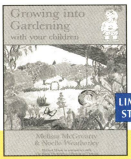

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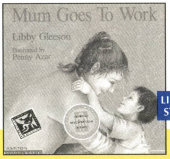

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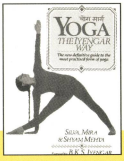

YOGA THE IYENGAR WAY
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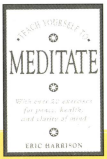

ACH YOURSELF TO MEDITATE
his is an easy-to-follow guide to meditation, hich can help you overcome the stresses of eryday life.
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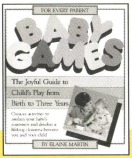

BABY GAMES
A wealth of imaginative ideas and songs to use when playing with your child (from birth to three years).
$17 paperback 183 pp Code: BG

HOW TO STAY SANE IN YOUR BABY'S FIRST YEAR
A good basic guide covering all the important issues new parents are likely to face in the first 12 months.
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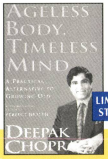
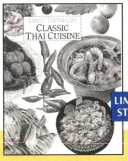
LIMITED STOCK

IP REPLACEMENT — A CONSUMERS' GUIDE
1991 Leonie Star had her right hip replaced. fter the operation she realised how little formation is available about it. This very ractical book is the result. It includes details on reparing for the operation and your return ome, the procedure itself and a list of what to o and what not to do.
20 paperback 88 pp Code: HRCG



LIMITED STOCK

AGELESS BODY, TIMELESS MIND
Is aging inevitable? Drawing on his background in both Ayurvedic and western medicine, Dr Deepak Chopra examines this question by considering the interaction of mind and body processes. This book combines understandable theory, inspiring case studies and practical exercises.
$20 paperback 342 pp Code: ABTM



LIMITED STOCK

CLASSIC THAI CUISINE
Celebrated Sydney chef David Thompson has put together a book of 100 exciting and healthy Thai recipes that can be prepared and enjoyed at home.
$25 hardcover 144 pp Code: CTC

PUTTING BACK PAIN BEHIND YOU

JUST AS A CAR NEEDS OIL, so your body needs exercise to lubricate it. This is especially true of your back. Back exercises strengthen the muscles supporting the spine and keep the joints mobile. Not only can exercise relieve back pain in some cases, a strong, supple back is better equipped to deal with awkward positions and sudden movements.

The following exercises and advice are from *Understanding Back Trouble*, published by CHOICE next month. A golden rule to follow with all of them is if it hurts — stop! If you're very stiff, a little discomfort while you stretch is normal, but it should stop when you finish the exercise. Always start with gentle exercises, build up the number of repetitions, then, when you can easily do 12 or 15, add harder ones to your routine.

EXERCISES FOR THE LOWER BACK

Low back pain is more common in people with poor posture, weak abdominal muscles, stiffness and tight hip muscles. Exercise can help address all these problems.

The abdominals

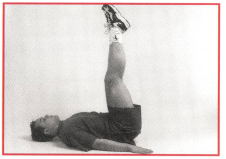
Strong abdominal muscles give your back extra protection. Even tightening these muscles throughout the day helps strengthen them. Other, more serious-looking lower back exercises start with lying on the floor with the knees bent, as in the pictures on the right. The easiest exercise involves resting one hand on your abdomen. Take a deep slow breath in; as you breathe out, gently pull in your abdominal muscles. Repeat five times.

The next exercise mobilises the lumbar spine (lowest part) as well strengthening the abdominal and hip extensor muscles (the ones that stretch or straighten the joint). Lying in the same position, try flattening the hollow in your back down on to the floor. At the same time squeeze your buttocks together so that the lower part of your pelvis lifts slightly. When you've mastered these simple exercises, try the ones pictured on the right. For each exercise, build up the number of repetitions until you can easily do 12 to 15, then add the next one.

Lift your head and shoulders and slide your hands up to your knees while keeping your feet firmly pressed onto the floor. Hold for a count of four and lower your head and shoulders.

Cross your arms over your chest, lift your head and shoulders and reach with the elbow in the direction of the opposite knee. Hold for a count of four; repeat with the other side.

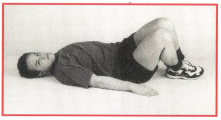
1. Lift both bent knees onto your chest.



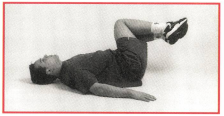
2. Keeping your back on the floor, straighten your legs towards the ceiling and hold. Bend your knees and put your feet back on the floor. As well as strengthening the abdominals, this exercise also stretches the hamstrings (the muscles at the back of the legs).

Getting mobile

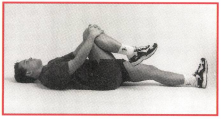
These exercises will mobilise your spine and hips, stretch muscles joining the lumbar spine and hip and strengthen the abdominals too. This series of exercises also starts with lying on the floor with your knees bent.



1. Keeping feet and knees together, let your legs drop down from side to side.



2. When you're happy with this movement, progress to the same movement with your feet off the floor.



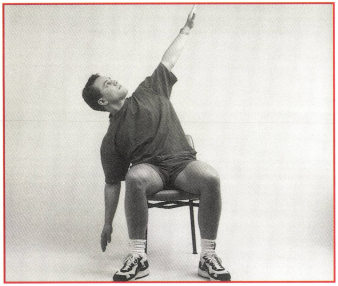
Bend one knee to your chest and hold it with both hands, push your other leg straight and as flat as possible onto the floor. Repeat with the other leg.

Leg strengthening

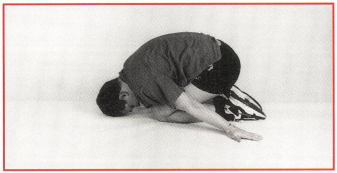
Strong legs are the key to safe lifting — they can help you push as well as lift. To build the muscles in your legs, sit in a firm chair with your arms held out in front of you. Stand up and sit down 10 times. When your leg muscles have mastered this, try it sitting on a low stool. When you feel able, do the same thing standing on one leg only.

EXERCISES FOR THE THORACIC SPINE

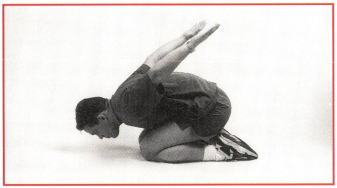
Thinking before you lift shopping out of the boot of the car or a baby into a cot can save some of the strain on your thoracic spine — the part around chest level. It is particularly important to keep this middle part of the spine straight when lifting. To ease an aching back, pull your shoulder blades together, tightening the back muscles. The exercises pictured below may also help.



Sit on a chair with your knees apart, then bend sideways to reach with one hand down towards the floor. At the same time raise the other arm sideways and backwards, rotating the spine to look up at the upstretched arm.



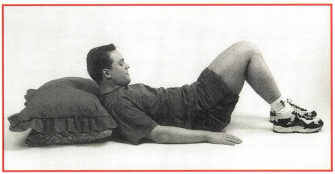
1. Kneel down and sit on your heels. Bend forward and rest your forehead on the floor in front of your knees, with your arms by your side, palms downwards.



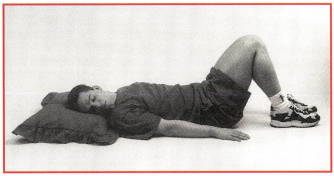
2. Lift your head and shoulders, being careful not to arch the neck. Lift your arms and turn them so the backs of the hands are facing each other.

EXERCISES FOR THE CERVICAL SPINE

The average head weighs 5.5 kg, so posture — how your neck supports that weight — is crucial. Your head should be above your shoulders, not in front of them. Balancing a book on your head gives you the feeling of good neck posture. Shrugging your shoulders up to your ears a couple of times can help ease the tension in the neck and shoulders. Other exercises which can help are shown below.

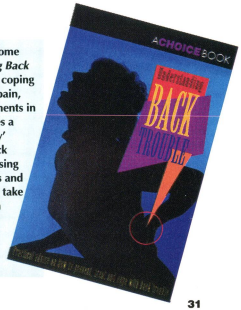


Lie on your back with your head on two pillows and knees bent. Raise your head smoothly and press your chin onto your chest, feeling the stretch in the back of the neck. Lower gently and repeat four times.



Remove one pillow, gently turn your head to one side, feel the stretch, hold for a few seconds and turn to the other side. Repeat four times.

As well as giving more home exercises, *Understanding Back Trouble* offers advice on coping with a sudden attack of pain, analyses orthodox treatments in some detail and describes a range of 'complementary' therapies. It explains back problems such as ankylosing spondylitis, arachnoiditis and osteoporosis and how to take best care of your back in day-to-day activities. It's available from CHOICE and good bookshops from October for $18.



CONSUMER IN LAW

THE CREDIT REFERENCE ASSOCIATION

Applied for a loan or a credit card lately? Chances are there's a file out there with your name on it. Here's how to find out what it says.

WE LAST TOOK A LOOK AT THE Credit Reference Association of Australia (CRAA) back in 1989 (*Consumer in law*, June 1989). Since then quite a bit has happened to change the way this organisation operates. New privacy legislation, in the form of the Privacy Act and its various amendments, has limited the type of information that can be held and set down strict guidelines about the way the information can be used.

The CRAA holds information in three broad areas: consumer credit, commercial credit and public record information. The commercial credit information pertains to company and business dealings. This is not covered directly by the Privacy Act and is kept separate from consumer credit information. In this article we take a look at the way the CRAA deals with consumer credit information.

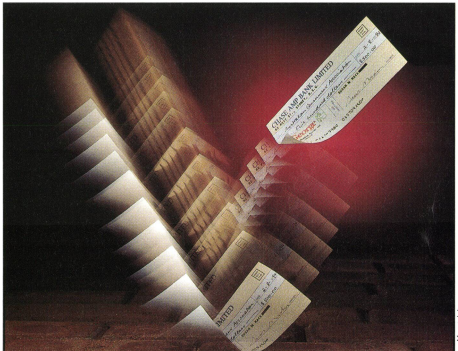


Photo: Kent Mears

What is the CRAA?

Established in 1968, the CRAA is an association of credit providers and other companies who have an interest in credit. Its members include banks, finance companies, department stores, credit unions, building societies and insurance companies plus a wide range of manufacturing and wholesale organisations.

The association is a non-profit organisation and is owned and controlled by its members. It currently holds records on 12 million Australian individuals and trading organisations and can allow its members access to these records under certain conditions for the purpose of checking on your credit history.

What information does it keep?

Myths abound regarding the type of consumer credit information the CRAA holds and how it's used. You don't, for instance, get a black mark against your name every time you're a few days late paying your Bankcard bill. Another misconception is that the CRAA gives you some type of 'credit rating'. It doesn't. A bank may rate the risk of giving you credit after it's seen your file and taken into account other information, but the CRAA merely collects information relating to your credit history.

The type of information the CRAA is allowed to hold on an individual is regulated by the Privacy Act, which came into force in 1989, though recent additions and amendments have tightened this control. The information is limited to these types:

- Identification details such as your name, date of birth, address, driver's licence number and employer.
- Public record information such as bankruptcy or debt judgments which have been recorded against you by the courts (though in NSW, the state government does not currently allow the CRAA access to debt judgment records).
- Details of inquiries made by CRAA members when you apply for credit.
- Information regarding your financial commitments with CRAA members.
- Reports from CRAA members concerning credit defaults.

A credit default in this case is not simply being a little overdue on a loan payment. To be lodged as a default, a payment must be at least 60 days overdue and the credit provider must have commenced recovery proceedings. Another area of default is a bounced cheque. If you write a cheque for more than $100 which is subsequently presented and disallowed twice, this may be recorded on your file.

The CRAA is not allowed to hold information which is not directly related to an individual's credit history. It doesn't, for example, hold information on a person's:

A MINI SURVEY

WE INTERVIEWED 26 PEOPLE who had recently applied for a copy of their CRAA file to get a feel for the accuracy of the information supplied. Here's a summary of the results.

People without files

Of the 26 people interviewed, six were told that the CRAA currently held no information on them.

People with files

Of the 20 people on whom the CRAA did hold information, eight told us their files contained one or more errors:

- Five of the files contained errors in current or previous addresses.
- Two files had the person's current employer incorrect.
- One file had a mistake in the driver's licence number.
- One file had a loan amount of $8000 more than that which was actually requested.

While none of these errors is particularly serious and probably wouldn't adversely affect any of the respondent's future credit applications, it does show that errors can and do occur.

What wasn't on file

Many of the survey respondents commented regarding things they thought would be on their file but weren't. Some people had taken out home loans which didn't appear in the file. Others had various credit cards not listed. It is important to remember that entries on your file are lodged with the CRAA by the credit providers. If they approve your home loan without needing to look at your file then no entry will appear. Also, the CRAA does not keep a record of your current credit payment record, merely your credit history, and records are only kept for five years. If you've had a credit card or home loan for more than five years it may not be listed because the record of your application will have been deleted.

From our survey it appears the CRAA is efficient and prompt at dealing with consumers' requests for access to their files. Though the errors themselves were minor, the fact that substantial numbers of files had errors or contained outdated information highlights the importance of the individual's right to look at their own file. It also shows the problem of maintaining accuracy of information in any substantial collection of data.

- Race or national origins.
- Political, social or religious beliefs.
- Lifestyle or sexual practices.
- Criminal record.

An area that many people are surprised about when they see their credit reference file is the lack of positive information, such as successfully paying off a loan on or before time or regularly paying off credit card debts. In fact the Privacy Act does not allow this 'positive reporting'. While this may appear to give a one-sided view of your credit dealings, it does protect your privacy by not allowing the CRAA to build up a picture of your spending and payment patterns. Also, the lack of any negative information on your file shows that you have not got into any trouble with credit and, therefore, positive reporting is not regarded as necessary.

Why does it keep the information?

The main idea behind the CRAA is to provide financial institutions with information on an individual's or company's credit history when weighing up an application for credit. The information is useful to financial institutions by alerting them to credit problems you may have experienced in the recent past and acts as a check of the information you've supplied on your credit application.

An incidental benefit to consumers can be to prevent someone who is having trouble with credit from getting in any deeper or overcommitting themselves. If a person has made several recent applications for credit which are listed on their CRAA file, and is applying for further credit, it could mean they are overcommitting themselves and may have trouble repaying at a later date.

A misconception is that the CRAA gives you some type of 'credit rating'. It doesn't. It merely collects information relating to your credit history.

However, it could also be the case that the person has a legitimate need for the credit and has the ability to pay. According to Hayden Park, Retail Manager for the National Australia Bank, the information from the CRAA is only a part of the assessment process undergone when someone applies for credit. A credit reference file is primarily an alert mechanism and the bank will check further if something untoward is thrown up.

Tip: Under the Privacy Act a credit provider must inform you if it is rejecting an application for credit because of something in your CRAA file. You can check this by getting a copy of the file (see *Getting a copy of your file*, overleaf) to give you the chance to correct or explain any entries that appear.

How long do they keep the information?

The information the CRAA collects is not kept indefinitely but is limited to five years. Once a month the CRAA computer system searches all the files on record and deletes any entries which are more than five years old. If you haven't made any credit applications in the past five years it's possible that there'll be no entries left in the file. In this case the whole file is deleted and the CRAA will have no record of you at all.

David Hollott, the Senior General Manager of Marketing at Citibank, was quick to dispel a commonly held belief that not being listed with the CRAA means you are disadvantaged when applying for credit. This is not true. The lack of a CRAA file just means you haven't applied for credit in the last five years and that you haven't got into any credit difficulties in that time.

How does the CRAA get the information?

The CRAA primarily gets its information from its members. Whenever you apply for or default on some type of credit, the credit provider involved will report the details to the CRAA, which will note it in your file. When you apply for a loan or other credit, the provider must inform you of the possibility that the information may be passed on. This is usually stated on the credit application form.

The CRAA does not, under normal circumstances, take information from institutions or individuals who are not members. If, for instance, you have a dispute with your neighbour who claims he lent you $20 that you never paid back, he can't ring the CRAA and get it put on your file.

Another source (except in NSW) is public record information such as bankruptcy or debt judgments against you.

Who has access to my file?

Access to your consumer credit file is limited to CRAA members who are defined under the Privacy Act as being credit providers. This includes:

- Banks, building societies, credit unions and retailers that provide credit.
- Mortgage insurers.
- A trade credit provider.

Even these organisations, though, don't have unrestricted access to your file. They're normally only allowed to see it, without your specific permission, when you have made an application for consumer credit. Access to your consumer credit file can also be given if you've applied for commercial credit or agreed to act as a guarantor for a loan, but in these cases the credit provider must get your written permission.

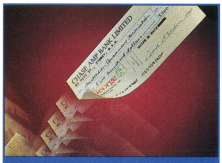
Government agencies such as the taxation department, police and social security may obtain special permission to see your file in the course of an investigation.

Can I see my file?

Under the Privacy act you have a legal right of access to your consumer credit file. The CRAA processes many thousands of requests a year from consumers wishing to obtain a copy of their file, and the numbers are rising.

You can apply for your file any time. You don't need to have been refused credit or have any reason other than wanting to see your file. According to Bruce Bargon, General Manager of the CRAA, about 65% of the people asking to see their files have not recently been refused credit. He feels consumers are becoming more aware of the credit reporting system and are getting their file before they apply for credit.

To get a copy of your consumer credit file you need to apply to the CRAA in writing. In *Getting a copy of your file* below there is an example of a request letter detailing the information you need to supply. The personal identification information is important because the CRAA must match this with the files it holds in order to ensure it sends the correct person's file. Mix-ups can occur, for instance, when a father and son have the same name and live at the same address, or two people with the same name live in the same street. If you think this sort of problem could occur with your file make it known in your application letter. This will alert the CRAA to a potential problem and save you from an identity crisis.



The fact that ... files had errors or contained outdated information highlights the importance of the individual's right to look at their own file.

What if there's wrong information in my file?

Regardless of the care taken, mistakes and outdated information are inevitable in the collection of any large body of data. The files held by the CRAA are no exception and this is the reason that right of access is so important. It gives you the opportunity to check the information held and ensure its accuracy.

So what do you do if you get your consumer credit file and find an entry that you don't agree with? The first thing is to contact the CRAA. The covering letter that came with your file information will give a 008 toll-free number for disputes. Ring this number and explain the nature of your complaint to the operator. The CRAA is then obliged to settle the dispute within 28 days.

If the disputed entry involves credit details, it will generally contact the credit provider to check them. If the credit provider can't substantiate the details of the entry, it will be deleted from your file. If the credit provider has evidence that the entry is legitimate it will stay on your file, but you do have the right to attach a comment to the file explaining your side of the story. If you're still not happy, you can ask for help from the Privacy Commissioner, who has the power to investigate and resolve a complaint and, if appropriate, to order an amendment to the information in a file and, in some cases, order compensation.

Conclusions

The CRAA has certainly lifted its game in the last few years, due in part at least to the requirements imposed by the Privacy Act. The organisation is more 'consumer friendly' and the information it gathers much more controlled.

Questions, however, must still be asked about the credit reporting system as a whole. How useful and effective is a system which relies primarily on the voluntary supply of information from its members? There can be no guarantee that the information is a complete or accurate picture of someone's credit history. If a credit provider doesn't tell the CRAA that it has just given you a substantial home loan, the information doesn't appear on your file.

Why have credit reporting at all? The

GETTING A COPY OF YOUR FILE

GETTING A COPY of your credit reference file is a simple procedure. You need to make a written request and supply a few personal details for identification purposes. The CRAA will then send you a copy of your file free of charge. You don't need to have been refused credit to see your file but can get a copy of it at any time. On the right is a sample letter from *Put it in writing — 77 letters that get results* (available from our Consumer Bookshelf).

Address the letter to **Credit Reference Association Australia, PO Box 964, North Sydney 2059**. If you have any problems or queries, contact the CRAA on (02) 964 7555.

Dear Sir or Madam,

Please send me a copy of my credit reference file.

I have lived at the following address/es for the past three years: [list addresses]

My date of birth is: [date]

My driver's licence number is: [number]

Yours faithfully,
[Sign here and then print your name in full]

idea behind the system is reasonable: to help the industry determine the risks when providing credit. Current credit reporting, though, is a blunt tool. Allowing the CRAA to keep more information, such as positive reporting of loan payments, is not the answer. The system, like a crocheted blanket, has many holes. Making the blanket bigger just means more holes.

The credit providers we spoke to used the CRAA regularly but admitted that its input was only a small cog in the complicated consumer credit machine. According to the CRAA's Bruce Bargon, the need to comply with the Privacy Act has led some organisations to opt out of the system altogether. If its own members can live without it, is it really necessary at all?

Contacts

■ **Credit Reference Association of Australia:**
PO Box 966, North Sydney 2059.
Phone (02) 964 7555.
Fax (02) 956 7521.
Send applications for a copy of your consumer credit file to PO Box 964, North Sydney 2059.

■ **Tasmanian Collection Service:**
29 Argyle Street, Hobart 7000.
Phone (002) 23 5599.
(See *For Tasmanian residents...* below.)

■ **Privacy Commissioner:**
GPO Box 5218, Sydney 2001.

■ **Privacy Commission hotline:**
008 023 985.

FOR TASMANIAN RESIDENTS...

IN TASMANIA an organisation called the Tasmanian Collection Service (TCS) collects consumer credit information and acts in a similar way to the CRAA. According to its director, Peter Cretan, the TCS has more coverage of Tasmanian residents than the CRAA. The consumer credit information it collects and its duties of disclosure and access are the same, under the Privacy Act, as that of the CRAA, so the general principles we've talked about in this article apply to the TCS as well.

Tasmanian residents wishing to get a copy of their consumer credit file from the TCS should follow the same procedure we've detailed in *Getting a copy of your file*, but the letter should be sent to the address given above.

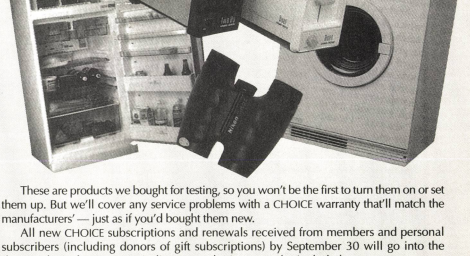
For further information, phone the TCS on (002) 23 5599.

The 13th CHOICE Subscriber Draw

For new subscriptions and renewals received July 1 to September 30, 1994

Subscriber draws are now held quarterly and on October 4 we'll be holding our thirteenth. The lucky winner will be able to choose any two products from the following tests, published January 1994 to March 1994.

- ☐ Car CD players (January 1994)
- ☐ Blenders (January 1994)
- ☐ 395–450 L refrigerators (February 1994)
- ☐ Clothes dryers (February 1994)
- ☐ Compact binoculars (March 1994)
- ☐ Toasters (March 1994)



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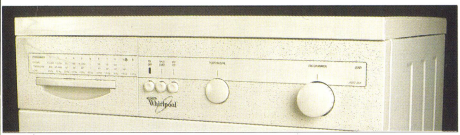
COMING CLEAN

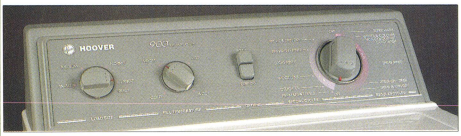
We've put our testing money where our environmental mouth is and compared washing machines on the basis of a cold water wash.

BACK IN 1963 when we first tested washing machines we used a hot wash. Later we decided a warm wash was more appropriate because that's how most people washed their clothes. It's also what's specified in the Australian Standard to determine an acceptable washing machine. However, given the increased popularity of cold water washing and the environmental benefits to be gained, we decided it was time to compare machines based on cold water washing. The result is that washing performance is slightly lower and energy consumption is greatly reduced.

A study in Victoria by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) a couple of years ago found around half the people surveyed washed in cold water. Their major reason was to save money rather than to help the environment. Of those who'd considered washing in cold water but hadn't, the main reason by far was because they didn't think cold water washing was as good as warm. This is backed up by our tests, but the differences aren't always noticeable, particularly on darker colours. A significant number of people in the ABS study who washed with cold water thought it was just as good as warm.

The new wave continues — moving your laundry out of the '50s and into the '90s. Electronic touch controls (as on the Fisher & Paykel 501 below) are increasingly common, and even the old-style mechanical controls have been given a new look on some models like the Whirlpool AWG384 and Hoover 900. But there are still some black and chrome monoliths around: the GE WWA 6604 (bottom) really shows up the old vs the new.





The most noticeable effect of washing in cold water is that energy consumption is much lower than in previous tests, since most of the energy was used to heat the water, either in your hot water system or by the machine. The dirt removal figures are also slightly lower: none of the machines tested this time met the Australian Standard requirements for warm water dirt removal — 80% — when tested with cold water. Standards Australia is considering cold water washing for future washing machine standards.

However, the environmental and cost savings are clear. The machines we could compare between this current test (cold water wash) and the last one (warm water) used between twice as much and 14 times as much energy in the warm wash as the cold. Over the course of a year this will mean an average saving of $40 or so on your electricity bill and hundreds of kilograms of CO_2 from the power station. A lifecycle analysis of washing machines commissioned by the Consumers' Association a couple of years ago found the greatest environmental impact of a washing machine came not from its manufacture or disposal but from heating the water for a warm wash.

MACHINES UNDER $1200

In past washing machine tests we have tried to cover virtually all washing machines on the market by testing the most recent models and combining the results with those from past tests to make a complete picture of all the machines available. With the change to cold water washing we've had to go back to the

beginning and test every machine from scratch. For this report we have tested machines under $1200 (the most popular price range) with a maximum load size between 4 kg and 5.5 kg. More machines are currently being tested and results will be published in an update in November.

Washing in cold water

Our test methods are very precise. The amount of detergent is calculated based on the amount of water used to fill the tub. It is measured out and dissolved in warm water before being added to the wash in order to achieve the best possible results. This isn't the way the average person washes, however, with a rough sprinkle of detergent into the tub. For best results in cold water washing you might consider dissolving the detergent beforehand in warm water.

Since the detergent becomes the biggest environmental hazard of a washing machine once you eliminate hot water, you might also like to consider your use of detergent. The manufacture of detergent and its packaging leads to the creation of significant amounts of greenhouse gases, and its use in machines pollutes our waterways. If this concerns you, try reducing the amount you use and see if it affects how clean the clothes look. We looked at the running costs of washing machines in this test and found detergent to be the main factor here as well (see *Running costs* below).

If you choose a washing machine that uses less water (see column 4 in the table) you probably won't need to use as much detergent, but check out the dirt removal scores first (column 8 in the table). Some machines with low water consumption don't wash particularly well.

Running costs

Because washing machines are expensive to buy you want to get the best value for money, but running costs are another factor in the equation. We assessed the running costs of these machines and found it ranged from $60 per year for the **GORENJE PS 99** to $130 a year for the **GE WWA 6604**. Other machines with running costs under $80 a year were the **IGNIS AWL305, GORENJE PS 400 GX, OMEGA 505-2** and the **HITACHI SAF-1020PX**.

This assessment was based on a number of assumptions — that you wash 1000 kg of clothes a year using a full load each time, electricity costs 10 c/kWh, water costs 65 c/kL and detergent costs $3.50/kg. The detergent cost ended up being around 75% of the total running costs.

Looking at a combination of purchase price and running cost, the two **GORENJE PACIFIC** machines were the cheapest in the long run. However, we're reluctant to recommend them as value-for-money machines, because a high proportion of **GORENJE**s owned by our survey respondents needed repair in the last 12 months and this will increase their overall running costs (see *How reliable are they?* below). The **IGNIS AWL305** and the **SIMPSON Riviera 429** and its **Concorde/Deluxe/Genesis** and **WESTINGHOUSE 555** clones lead the next group of cheaper machines that performed well.

WHAT TO BUY

First decide whether you want a top or a front loader. Their washing performance is much the same but front loaders tend to do better in other areas (water efficiency, gentleness and spin efficiency), while many people think top loaders are more convenient (they're quicker and you can add to the wash mid-cycle).

The **WHIRLPOOL AWG384** was the best overall performer of the front loaders tested. However, there's very little difference between most of these front loaders for washing performance, and this **WHIRLPOOL** is expensive to buy and run. A better buy would be the **IGNIS AWL305**, though it's to be discontinued so may be hard to find, and scored poorly for spin efficiency; if you live in a cold, damp area its operating efficiency may be offset by increased drying costs.

FRONT LOADERS	
WHIRLPOOL AWG384	$1080
IGNIS AWL305	$900
OMEGA 505-2	$990
WHIRLPOOL AWG354	$950

The **HITACHI PAF-1260PX** came top of the top loaders, with the **FISHER & PAYKEL 501** and its twin **051** hot on its heels. The **ADMIRAL 510** is significantly cheaper and had the equal best washing results of all machines in this test. If you don't mind the high water consumption and average spin efficiency it's a good budget buy. Check out the prices of its twins in the **HOOVER** and **ADMIRAL** ranges (see table) as well, since they're technically similar and may have extra features that appeal to you.

TOP LOADERS	
HITACHI PAF-1260PX	$940
FISHER & PAYKEL 501/051	$900/$810
ADMIRAL 510	$590
HITACHI PAF-1220P	$870

* Prices shown are a good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide checks in June 1994.

HOW RELIABLE ARE THEY?

WE ASKED IN OUR SURVEY ON THE reliability of appliances if respondents' washing machines had needed repair in the last 12 months. The results are given on the right for the most popular brands. The number in brackets is the number of machines of the particular brand in the survey. Just over 20% of all machines needed some sort of repair in the past 12 months, at an average cost of $85.

Machines under six or seven years old were generally more reliable the younger they were. Brands such as Fisher & Paykel and Kleenmaid, which had a fairly low average age in our survey, may have benefited from this age factor, but they were still better than the average for their respective ages. The Hitachis, which had quite a high average age, were also noticeably better than average. Gorenje Pacific, which had a low average age, has no excuse for its poor performance.

Because this survey covered all machines which people own (new and old), it includes some brands we haven't tested and doesn't include some we have.

Brand (sample size)	% not needing repair
Kleenmaid (105)	93
Fisher & Paykel (135)	90
Hitachi (351)	86
General Electric (170)	82
Simpson (1041)	78
Whirlpool (147)	77
Hoover (1355)	74
Westinghouse (109)	73
Malleys (113)	71
Gorenje Pacific (89)	64

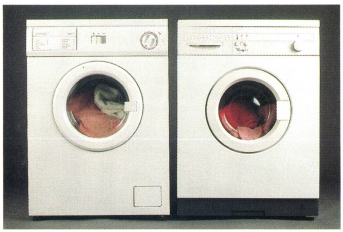
We also asked our panellists if they'd buy the same brand of washing machine again and got the following responses.

Brand	% who would buy again
Fisher & Paykel	98
Whirlpool	95
Hitachi	93
Westinghouse	93
Malleys	86
General Electric	85
Hoover	84
Kleenmaid	84
Simpson	84
Gorenje Pacific	74

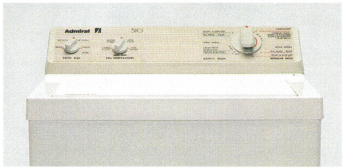
The top four front loaders: our price limit of $1200 for this new test ruled out the usual leaders of the pack — the Mieles, AEGs, Thors and other expensive European machines — and showed you can still get a choice of good front loaders for under $1000.

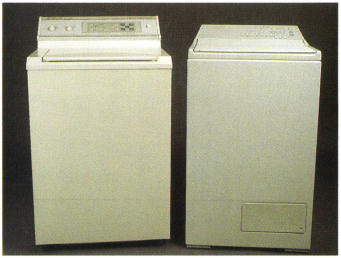
And the best top loaders: the Hitachis are reasonably good water savers and scored well for gentleness, while the Fisher & Paykels were top scorers for spin efficiency. All four (and their clones) washed well.

IGNIS AWL305 **WHIRLPOOL AWG384**

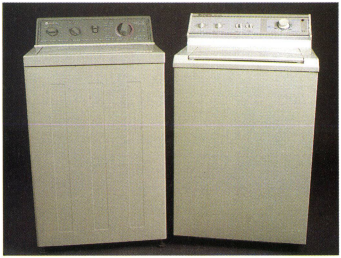


OMEGA 505-2 **WHIRLPOOL AWG354**





HITACHI PAF-1260PX **FISHER & PAYKEL 501**



HOOVER 900 **HITACHI PAF-1220P**

The Admiral 510 (left) is the cheapest machine in this test, with a target price of just $590. It's a clone of the tested Hoover 900 (pictured above) and others in the same range (see table for details). It has a powder-coated steel drum and a plastic top and lid instead of the Hoover's stainless steel bowl and metal top and lid, but if you treat it gently it should be a great way to get clean clothes at a bargain price. The Hoover Premier 705 ($610) and the Simpson Riviera 428 ($600) are also cheap, but their maximum load is 4 kg compared to the Admiral 510's 5 kg.

FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The machines in this test were assessed by an occupational therapist from the Independent Living Centre. Some problem areas were the lint filters on the **HITACHI**s and **SIMPSON**s, which were a bit fiddly to clean, and the detergent compartments in the **GORENJE PS 400 GX** and the **OMEGA 505-2**. The pale colour markings on the **FISHER & PAYKEL**s, **HITACHI SAF-1020PX** and the **SIMPSON**s could be difficult to make out for some people, while the dial of the **IGNIS AWL305** was considered confusing.

Good points included the delayed start feature on the **FISHER & PAYKEL**s, although the touchpad switches would be difficult to press for some people. The **GORENJE**s and the **WHIRLPOOL**s have doors that open wide and are easy to load and unload.

Overall, the best front loaders were the **GORENJE PS 99** and the **WHIRLPOOL**s (but see *Running costs* and *How reliable are they?* left, for more on the **GORENJE**s). Best of the top loaders was the **HOOVER Premier 705** and its twin the **710**.

Washing machines

	Brand and model (in rank order)	Manufacturer/ distributor	Origin	Target price* ($)	Warranty (years)	Dimensions HxWxD (mm)	Cycle time (minutes)	1 Wash load (kg)	2 Tap connection	2 Heater	3 Running cost ($/
equal	**HITACHI** PAF-1260PX **(T)**	Hitachi	Japan	940	3	1020 x 605 x 610	36	5.5	C/H&C		80
	WHIRLPOOL AWG 384 **(F)**	Whirlpool	Italy	1080	2 *(B)*	845 x 595 x 525	53	4.5	C/H&C	✓	90
equal	**FISHER & PAYKEL** 501 **(T)**	Fisher & Paykel	NZ	900	1 *(C)*	985 x 555 x 575	35	5	C/H&C		85
	FISHER & PAYKEL 051 **(T)**	Fisher & Paykel	NZ	810	1 *(C)*	985 x 555 x 575	35	5	C/H&C		85
	HITACHI PAF-1220P **(T)**	Hitachi	Japan	870	3	1030 x 605 x 610	36	5.5	C/H&C		80
	ADMIRAL 510 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	590	2	1020 x 595 x 590	50	5	C/H&C		90
	ADMIRAL 5100 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	780	2 *(D)*	1020 x 595 x 590	50	5	C/H&C		90
	HOOVER 770 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	780	2 *(D)*	1020 x 595 x 590	50	5	C/H&C		90
	HOOVER 800 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	870	2 *(D)*	1020 x 595 x 590	50	5	C/H&C		90
	HOOVER 900 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	830	2 *(D)*	1020 x 595 x 590	50	5	C/H&C		90
equal	**HOOVER** 972 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	950	2 *(D)*	1020 x 595 x 590	50	5	C/H&C		90
equal	**HOOVER** 1000 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	970	2 *(D)*	1020 x 595 x 590	50	5	C/H&C		90
	HOOVER Commodore 792 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	680	2 *(D)*	1020 x 595 x 590	50	5	C/H&C		90
	HOOVER Commodore 892 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	780	2 *(D)*	1020 x 595 x 590	50	5	C/H&C		90
	HOOVER Galaxy 784 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	740	2 *(D)*	1020 x 595 x 590	50	5	C/H&C		90
	HOOVER Galaxy 884 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	790	2 *(D)*	1020 x 595 x 590	50	5	C/H&C		90
	HOOVER Gemini 894 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	780	2 *(D)*	1020 x 595 x 590	50	5	C/H&C		90
	HOOVER Premier 750 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	750	2 *(D)*	1020 x 595 x 590	50	5	C/H&C		90
	GORENJE PS 400 GX **(F)**	Gorenje Pacific	Slovenia	820	1 *(E)*	855 x 595 x 600	46	4.5	C/H&C		65
equal	**IGNIS** AWL305 **(F)** *(A)*	Whirlpool	Italy	900	1 *(G)*	845 x 600 x 515	89	4.5	C	✓	65
	OMEGA 505-2 **(F)** *(A)*	Omega	Italy	990	2	850 x 595 x 530	90	4.5	C/H&C	✓	70
equal	**HITACHI** SAF-1020PX **(T)**	Hitachi	Japan	840	3	1000 x 570 x 570	34	4.5	C/H&C		75
equal	**WHIRLPOOL** AWG 354 **(F)**	Whirlpool	Italy	950	2 *(B)*	850 x 595 x 525	55	4.5	C/H&C	✓	80
	SIMPSON Concorde 527 **(T)**	Email	Australia	690	2 *(D)*	1030 x 575 x 620	40	5	C/H&C		85
	SIMPSON Deluxe 421 **(T)**	Email	Australia	700	2 *(D)*	1030 x 575 x 620	40	5	C/H&C		85
	SIMPSON Deluxe 526 **(T)**	Email	Australia	780	2 *(D)*	1030 x 575 x 620	40	5	C/H&C		85
	SIMPSON Genesis 525 **(T)**	Email	Australia	680	2 *(D)*	1030 x 575 x 620	40	5	C/H&C		85
	SIMPSON Genesis 528 **(T)**	Email	Australia	780	2 *(D)*	1030 x 575 x 620	40	5	C/H&C		85
	SIMPSON Riviera 429 **(T)**	Email	Australia	660	2 *(D)*	1030 x 575 x 620	40	5	C/H&C		85
equal	**WESTINGHOUSE** 555 **(T)**	Email	Australia	720	2 *(D)*	1030 x 575 x 620	40	5	C/H&C		85
	SIMPSON Contessa 425 **(T)**	Email	Australia	630	2 *(D)*	995 x 575 x 620	43	4	C/H&C		100
	SIMPSON Delta 422 **(T)**	Email	Australia	620	2 *(D)*	995 x 575 x 620	43	4	C/H&C		100
	SIMPSON Genesis 524 **(T)**	Email	Australia	730	2 *(D)*	995 x 575 x 620	43	4	C/H&C		100
	SIMPSON Riviera 428 **(T)**	Email	Australia	600	2 *(D)*	995 x 575 x 620	43	4	C/H&C		100
	WESTINGHOUSE 425 **(T)**	Email	Australia	620	2 *(D)*	995 x 575 x 620	43	4	C/H&C		100
	GORENJE PS 99 **(F)**	Gorenje Pacific	Slovenia	780	1 *(E)*	855 x 595 x 600	45	4.5	C/H&C		60
equal	**HOOVER** 710 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	680	2 *(D)*	990 x 600 x 600	39	4	C/H&C		110
	HOOVER Premier 705 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	610	2 *(D)*	990 x 600 x 600	39	4	C/H&C		110
equal	**AMERICANA** AW9830 **(T)**	MEA	Canada	970	1 *(H)*	1090 x 680 x 650	42	5	C/H&C		125
	GE WWA 6604 **(T)**	MEA	Canada	1140	2 *(J)*	1090 x 685 x 640	41	5	C/H&C		130

* Prices shown are a good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide checks in June 1994.

(F) Front loader.

(T) Top loader.

(A) To be discontinued but may be available in some stores.

(B) 10 years on outer tub.

(C) Additional one-year warranty available if you complete and return the *Smart Care* card.

(D) Five-year parts warranty on various components.

(E) Two-year warranty on parts for the main motor.

(G) Five years on outer tub.

(H) Two years on sealed transmission and main motor.

(J) Five-year parts warranty for rust and 10-year parts warranty for gearbox assembly.

CLONES

Some machines are identical in performance though sold or badged under a variety of names and with different features. These groups of 'clones' are indicated in the brand-name column by a square bracket to the right of the names. While their performance should be identical, different features and wash programs account for differences in price.

1 Wash load

This is the load stated on the Energy Rating Label and the load we tested at. Generally this is a bit more than you would normally put into the machine. Particularly for front loaders it becomes a bit of a struggle to squeeze the last few items in.

2 Tap connections/heater

Machines marked 'C' have just the one inlet for connection to the cold tap. Machines marked 'C/H&C' have two inlets, though you only have to have one connected. If you want a warm wash and don't have a hot tap in your laundry, choose a model with a heater.

3 Running cost

This is an estimate of the cost of washing 1000 kg of clothes during a year. See *Running costs* in the main article for more information.

4 Water used/water efficiency

The first column gives the total amount of water used during the 'normal' wash cycle.

ter d (L)	4 Water efficiency score (%)	5 Energy efficiency score (%)	6 Gentleness score (%)	7 Spin efficiency score (%)	8 Dirt removal score (%)	9 Overall score (%)	Brand and model (in rank order)	
	53	98	72	58	77	73	**HITACHI** PAF-1260PX **(T)**	equal
	54	96	78	61	74	73	**WHIRLPOOL** AWG 384 **(F)**	
	46	98	70	65	74	72	**FISHER & PAYKEL** 501 **(T)**	equal
	46	98	70	65	74	72	**FISHER & PAYKEL** 051 **(T)**	
	56	98	70	52	72	70	**HITACHI** PAF-1220P **(T)**	
	44	96	70	47	78	70	**ADMIRAL** 510 **(T)**	
	44	96	70	47	78	70	**ADMIRAL** 5100 **(T)**	
	44	96	70	47	78	70	**HOOVER** 770 **(T)**	
	44	96	70	47	78	70	**HOOVER** 800 **(T)**	
	44	96	70	47	78	70	**HOOVER** 900 **(T)**	
	44	96	70	47	78	70	**HOOVER** 972 **(T)**	equal
	44	96	70	47	78	70	**HOOVER** 1000 **(T)**	
	44	96	70	47	78	70	**HOOVER** Commodore 792 **(T)**	
	44	96	70	47	78	70	**HOOVER** Commodore 892 **(T)**	
	44	96	70	47	78	70	**HOOVER** Galaxy 784 **(T)**	
	44	96	70	47	78	70	**HOOVER** Galaxy 884 **(T)**	
	44	96	70	47	78	70	**HOOVER** Gemini 894 **(T)**	
	44	96	70	47	78	70	**HOOVER** Premier 750 **(T)**	
	71	97	82	33	67	69	**GORENJE** PS 400 GX **(F)**	
	62	94	80	32	71	69	**IGNIS** AWL305 **(F)** *(A)*	equal
	50	94	82	33	74	69	**OMEGA** 505-2 **(F)** *(A)*	
	45	97	64	58	70	68	**HITACHI** SAF-1020PX **(T)**	equal
	64	95	80	28	70	68	**WHIRLPOOL** AWG 354 **(F)**	
	51	97	62	43	73	67	**SIMPSON** Concorde 527 **(T)**	
	51	97	62	43	73	67	**SIMPSON** Deluxe 421 **(T)**	
	51	97	62	43	73	67	**SIMPSON** Deluxe 526 **(T)**	
	51	97	62	43	73	67	**SIMPSON** Genesis 525 **(T)**	
	51	97	62	43	73	67	**SIMPSON** Genesis 528 **(T)**	
	51	97	62	43	73	67	**SIMPSON** Riviera 429 **(T)**	
	51	97	62	43	73	67	**WESTINGHOUSE** 555 **(T)**	
	40	96	60	49	77	67	**SIMPSON** Contessa 425 **(T)**	equal
	40	96	60	49	77	67	**SIMPSON** Delta 422 **(T)**	
	40	96	60	49	77	67	**SIMPSON** Genesis 524 **(T)**	
	40	96	60	49	77	67	**SIMPSON** Riviera 428 **(T)**	
	40	96	60	49	77	67	**WESTINGHOUSE** 425 **(T)**	
	70	97	76	33	62	66	**GORENJE** PS 99 **(F)**	
	34	96	64	40	78	66	**HOOVER** 710 **(T)**	equal
	34	96	64	40	78	66	**HOOVER** Premier 705 **(T)**	
	27	94	68	41	75	65	**AMERICANA** AW9830 **(T)**	equal
	26	95	74	41	75	65	**GE** WWA 6604 **(T)**	

To assess the water efficiency we looked at the amount of water used per kilogram of clothes washed. We then converted this to a rating where a lower water consumption per kilogram gets a higher score. You may be unconcerned about water consumption at the moment, but Australia has limited water resources. If you buy a washing machine now you're likely to have it for the next 10 years or more, and water prices will probably rise significantly in most places during that time.

5 Energy efficiency

We measured energy efficiency on the basis of kilowatt hours (kWh) of electricity used for each kilogram of a load of washing. The scores are so high because we used cold water.

6 Gentleness

Swatches of easily frayed embroidery material were attached to garments in each wash load. The area of the swatch was measured before and after the wash. The less fraying that occurred, the more gentle the machine and the higher the score.

7 Spin efficiency

This was calculated by weighing the clothes after the whole wash cycle was completed to determine how much water was still in them.

8 Dirt removal

Dirt removal was assessed using specially soiled white swatches. The brightness of the swatch (measured by the amount of light reflected) indicates how clean it is. These figures are lower than in previous years, undoubtedly the result of switching to a cold wash — see page 37 for more on this.

9 Overall score

Dirt removal makes up 40% of the overall score since this is the primary purpose of a washing machine. The other four performance factors — water efficiency, energy efficiency, gentleness and spin efficiency — were weighted equally at 15% of the overall score.

OVEN CLEANERS

The market for oven cleaners is declining, but Australians still buy two million cans a year. Non-caustic products are on the increase and our tests found some performed just as well as the traditional caustic cleaners.

WIPING AN OVEN after each use with a damp cloth and an all-purpose detergent or bicarbonate of soda will remove most food spills easily, especially if it's done when the oven is still warm. For burnt-on spills and stains, however, you need a lot of elbow grease — or one of the specially formulated oven cleaners which are claimed to "cut through baked-on grease and grime" and "work wonders".

To test whether they live up to their promises, we put them to work on heavily soiled oven panels. While most made the cleaning chore much easier, none removed all the grime without some degree of scouring.

CAUSTIC VERSUS NON-CAUSTIC

Sodium hydroxide, also known as caustic soda or lye, is a strong alkali used in many oven cleaners. It reacts with fats and changes them into soapy compounds you can wash away. But burnt-on foodstuffs aren't the only things the chemical can attack. Sodium hydroxide can corrode kitchen surfaces and pipe work in sewers — and it can destroy living tissue. If it comes into contact with skin or eyes, it can cause deep burns, blindness or severe irritation.

All but two of the caustic oven cleaners contain about 4% sodium hydroxide; the **AMWAY** and **HI-SPEED** products have 6.65% and 9% respectively. **AMWAY** did quite well, but **HI-SPEED**, despite its high caustic content, cleaned less well than some of the non-caustic products. You should protect yourself when using any oven cleaner, but with this one, take care to cover your hands and arms particularly well and protect your eyes. It has to be applied laboriously with a short and rather stiff nylon brush, and we found the highly caustic liquid can splatter about.

Sodium hydroxide is not the only potentially dangerous chemical in oven cleaners. Most, including those labelled non-caustic, contain a solvent and various other chemicals. Many of these are considered hazardous and can cause irritation to the skin, eyes and respiratory tract, if handled carelessly, in high doses or if exposure occurs too frequently.

We're not alone with our safety concerns about oven cleaners. One subscriber recently sent us the remainder of one can he won't use again. "I am not particularly susceptible to chemicals, but this nearly knocked me over," he wrote. "The label does say: do not inhale fumes, but how can you spray the stove while

The oven cleaners we tested: most worked well if left on the oven panels for 24 hours, but their effectiveness varied over shorter time periods.

standing outside the kitchen, for that's what you need to do to avoid the fumes. The alternative would be to use a full industrial respirator."

Worksafe Australia is currently reassessing potential health effects of a solvent from the glycol ether family — the type of chemical used in the **BIG BOY** oven cleaners. The **AMWAY** and both **MR MUSCLE** products also contain a solvent from this family. To be on the safe side, avoid inhaling vapours and protect your skin and eyes, regardless of whether you're using a caustic or non-caustic product. See *Protect yourself...*, right, for the kind of precautions to take.

Aerosols and the rest

Most of the oven cleaners we tested were **aerosol sprays**. They're generally easier and faster to apply than other types, but you're more likely to breathe in wafting mists. It's a good idea to wear a face mask or respirator when you spray them on. How well the foam covers large areas and adheres to oven surfaces varies between brands. The table overleaf indicates which ones had minor problems in our test; the best aerosols scored 90% for ease of use.

Nearly all the aerosols we tested are claimed in some way or other to be "ozone friendly" or "ozone safe". These claims are based on the fact that they

Not quite decked out for chemical warfare, but well protected from the potential risks of caustic soda.

Protect yourself ...

- Make sure your kitchen is well ventilated when you apply an oven cleaner.
- **Read the instructions carefully before you start** and apply the product accordingly.
- Elbow-length rubber or plastic gloves and a long-sleeved shirt are an absolute must to protect hands and arms. Long trousers and covered shoes are recommended. Remove and wash protective clothing immediately after use; accidental spills on clothing can damage your skin.
- Glasses or goggles are recommended to protect eyes from vapours or splatters.
- Try to avoid breathing in aerosol mists, which may damage the respiratory tract. A face mask or respirator will provide some protection.
- Store any cleaner containing sodium hydroxide in a poison cupboard, *not* under the kitchen sink or in easy reach of children. Only the **AMWAY** and **HI-SPEED** cleaners have child-resistant lids — all the others could easily be opened by a child. (Child-resistant closures aren't required for products which contain 5% sodium hydroxide or less.)

... and your environment

- Cover the floor beneath your oven with old newspaper. Place folded paper in the gap between the bottom of the door and the oven floor.
- Avoid applying any cleaner to the oven's pilot light, heating elements, door seals or fan (if any).
- Don't apply caustic cleaners to aluminium or painted surfaces, glass, microwave or self-cleaning ovens or any other surfaces outside the oven, unless the cleaner label states otherwise. Most ovens are lined with a vitreous enamel which looks like paint but has an impervious glaze.
- Before you wash off the cleaner, wipe off any residue with paper towels. Then wipe out the oven with a neutralising solution (Amway suggests 60 mL vinegar to 1 L water).
- Use paper towels to wipe excess cleaner from gloves before rinsing them in the neutralising solution.
- Don't empty unused oven cleaner down the drain. Use it up or wrap the container and place it in the garbage bin. In some areas, you can dispose of leftovers in special household chemical collections. Inquire at your local council.

Oven cleaners

	Brand/model (in rank order)	Manufacturer/ distributor	Origin	Type	Size	Price paid ($)	1 Active ingredient/ caustic content
	SELLEYS Oven Kleen	Selleys	not stated *(A)*	Aerosol	300 g *(A)*	2.60	Sodium hydroxide 4.00%
	AMWAY	Amway	USA	Aerosol	400 g	7.95	Sodium hydroxide 6.65%
equal	**HOME BRAND**	Grocery Wholesalers	Australia	Aerosol	300 g	1.45	Sodium hydroxide 4.00%
	MR MUSCLE Non-caustic	SC Johnson	not stated	Aerosol	400 g	3.62	not stated
	MR MUSCLE	Bristol-Myers	not stated	Aerosol	300 g	4.25	Sodium hydroxide 4.33%
	K2r Non-caustic	Biovital	Australia	Aerosol	400 g	3.56	not stated
equal	**DOT'S** Non-caustic	Boseven	Australia	Aerosol	400 g	3.43	not stated
equal	**SELLEYS** Oven Wizz	Selleys	not stated *(B)*	Aerosol	400 g	2.54	not stated
	BIG BOY	Reckitt & Colman	Australia	Aerosol	300 g *(C)*	2.75	Sodium hydroxide 4.00%
equal	**BI-LO**	Bi-Lo Supermarkets	Australia	Aerosol	300 g	2.37	not stated
	PAYLESS	Composite Buyers	Australia	Aerosol	300 g	1.56	Sodium hydroxide 4.00%
	Cloudy ammonia	not applicable	not applicable	Vapour deposition	not applicable	not applicable	Ammonia 3.7% w/w
	HI-SPEED	Kiwi Australia	not stated	Paint-on liquid	375 g	3.64	Sodium hydroxide 9.00%
	Bicarbonate of soda	not applicable	not applicable	Paint-on paste	not applicable	not applicable	Sodium bicarbonate

(A) Now comes in a 350 g can and has an Australian-made certification mark.
(B) Now has an Australian-made certification mark.
(C) Now comes in a 400 g can.
(D) We tested it in a cool oven.
(E) Five minutes in a warm oven, or 30 minutes in a cool one.
(F) Scored 75 when tested in a warm oven.

have hydrocarbons such as butane or pentane as propellants rather than ozone-damaging chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), which are no longer permitted in Australia for use in domestic cleaning products anyway. The MR MUSCLE caustic cleaner even proclaims: "helping protect the environment" — an obvious case of jumping onto the green marketing bandwagon! Aerosols can't really be claimed to be environmentally friendly:

Apart from caustic soda being potentially damaging to most environments, aerosols are far from 'green' because they can't be reused, recycled or even crushed to reduce the amount of garbage. This label is just marketing hype.

the packaging can't be reused or recycled or even crushed to reduce the amount of garbage.

Refillable trigger packs would make a difference, but the only oven cleaner we could find in a trigger pack, from the DOWN TO EARTH range, had been discontinued by the time we finished testing.

Environmentally sound alternatives

We also tried two cheap, home-made oven cleaners which are less hazardous than some commercial products. The first one — a solution of half a cup of cloudy ammonia (3.7%) and one cup of hot water — was easiest to use: just mixed together in an ovenproof dish and placed in a cool oven for 24 hours. The developing vapours were supposed to convert the fats into soaps, which would then be wiped away easily.

While this recipe might work for reasonably fresh food spills, it didn't live up to its promise with our baked-on foodstuffs. Both this and the other home-made cleaner — a paste of two parts of bicarbonate of soda and one part of water — required some heavy scrubbing to remove the stains. And the bicarb of soda paste was laborious and slow to apply with a brush.

However, if used regularly, the bicarbonate of soda mixture is an environmentally sound alternative. Cloudy ammonia doesn't damage the environment either, but it presents more health risks. People with chronic respiratory problems should avoid using it, as ammonia vapours can be extremely irritating to eyes and nose. If you use it for less stubborn stains, make sure your kitchen is well ventilated and avoid contact with the skin, as it's also alkaline.

Conclusion

Caustic oven cleaners can cause serious injuries if safety precautions aren't followed. Non-caustic products may also contain chemicals which can be hazardous if handled carelessly. Considering the potential risks involved, it's best to avoid them altogether and to clean the oven regularly before spills become a problem. If you do use an oven cleaner, make sure you follow the safety precautions.

Check the table to find the cleaner that best meets your requirements. If time is important and you want to finish the oven-cleaning chore in 30 minutes or less, you have to buy a caustic cleaner; non-caustic products take two to four hours to work. If you prefer one without caustic soda, you can achieve good results by leaving the foam on overnight. In fact all the commercial cleaners performed better over 24 hours, so we ranked them on that score, not the shorter time period we tested.

BEST BUYS

(Considering 24-hour cleaning performance and ease of use)

	SELLEYS Oven Kleen	$2.60
	AMWAY	$7.95
equal	**HOME BRAND**	$1.45
equal	**MR MUSCLE** Non-caustic	$3.62
	MR MUSCLE	$4.25

The prices shown are what we paid early in 1994.

en temperature	Short cleaning period (minutes)	2 Cleaning score (short period) (%)	2 Cleaning score (24 hours) (%)	3 Ease of use score (%)	4 Overall score (%)	Brand/model (in rank order)	
ol	30	60	95	90	95	**SELLEYS** Oven Kleen	
ol	30	80	95	80	90	**AMWAY**	
ol	30	60	90	90	90	**HOME BRAND**	equal
ol	240	70	90	90	90	**MR MUSCLE** Non-caustic	
ol	30	65	90	90	90	**MR MUSCLE**	
ol	120	65	80	90	85	**K2r** Non-caustic	
ol	240	65	80	90	85	**DOT'S** Non-caustic	equal
ol	240	65	80	90	85	**SELLEYS** Oven Wizz	equal
ol	5/30 *(E)*	65	95	65	85	**BIG BOY**	
stated *(D)*	not applicable	not applicable	75	70	75	**BI-LO**	equal
ol	30	50 *(F)*	85	55	75	**PAYLESS**	
ol	not applicable	not applicable	50	100	70	**Cloudy ammonia**	
ol	30	65	80	40	65	**HI-SPEED**	
ol	not applicable	not applicable	50	35	45	**Bicarbonate of soda**	

Recipe for a mess

To recreate a consistent degree of dirt with the sort of food spills present in an oven that's not cleaned after each use, we applied a special concoction (consisting of measured quantities of milk, sugar, cherry and tomato juice, vegetable oil, dripping, flour and a raw egg) onto test panels and 'baked' them for an hour and a half. After the panels had cooled down, we repeated the procedure with a second layer and then baked the panels once more the following day without adding any more of the paste.

All the caustic cleaners we tested are recommended to be left on for half an hour in a cool oven (**BIG BOY** also recommends an alternative of five minutes in a warm oven, which worked equally well); the non-caustic products recommend two to four hours. However, most manufacturers also suggest a longer waiting time for stubborn stains, or for best results. We did both — we've listed the products in the table in order of an overall score taking into account their 24-hour cleaning score and ease of use, but if you're after a product that works OK within a short time, check the short-period performance scores.

1 Active ingredient/caustic content

Caustic oven cleaners contain sodium hydroxide, which is also known as caustic soda or lye. It's a strong alkali used in many oven cleaners to change fats into soaps, which can then be washed away easily. (For the health and environmental effects of sodium hydroxide and other chemicals in oven cleaners, see *Caustic versus non-caustic* on page 42.)

2 Cleaning scores

We rated the oven cleaners according to the degree of cleaning required (including some scrubbing with a nylon scourer) to remove baked-on soil (see *Recipe for a mess*, left), after having first wiped off as much waste as possible. Most of the products were tested twice: once after leaving the foam, liquid or paste on for any recommended short period and once after 24 hours, as longer times were recommended for best results or for stubborn stains. We've given both scores in the table.

3 Ease of use

The ease of use score is based on how easy it was to apply the cleaner to the interior oven floor, walls and ceiling, and how well it covered and adhered to the surfaces.

4 Overall score

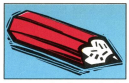
We weighted the scores as follows to get the overall score:

- Cleaning performance (24 hours): 60%.
- Ease of use: 40%.

THE LETTER BUT NOT THE SPIRIT ...

ALL THE CAUSTIC OVEN CLEANERS we tested were labelled in accordance with National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines for domestic, agricultural and industrial poisons. Product labels included the quantity of the poison (sodium hydroxide), warning statements as to the caustic nature of the product, safety directions and first aid instructions. The two oven cleaners which contained more than 5% sodium hydroxide complied with the stricter container and labelling requirements for this amount.

But considering the seriousness of injuries these cleaners can cause — and *have* caused, both here and overseas — product labels should contain more detailed and more *easily visible* information. In terms of first aid measures, for example, consumers need to know that if skin contact occurs, accidental spills have to be washed off **for 15 minutes**. Product labels only state to wash the skin "thoroughly", but how long is that? If you're standing at a basin running cold water over your hand or arm, three minutes might seem quite a long time, when in fact it's not long enough to prevent deep and long-term skin damage. Labels currently only mention this time span if the product gets into your eyes. Product labels should also recommend wearing protective clothing, such as goggles and a mask — not just gloves.



WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

1 On average what percentage of energy in the Australian diet comes from fat?
A) 12%
B) 25%
C) 37%
D) 48%

2 Health professionals generally recommend eating at least how much fibre per day?
A) 225 g
B) 115 g
C) 75 g
D) 30 g

3 Cyclamates, thaumatins and alitame are used in the food industry for what purpose?
A) As food colourings in tinned foods.
B) As pesticides on vegetable crops.
C) As artificial sweeteners in processed foods.
D) They are used in their gaseous form to speed up the ripening of fresh-picked fruit.

4 Telecom has recently been trialling a new technology called CND, which it hopes to introduce into domestic phones. What does CND stand for?
A) Congested network detection.
B) Consumer number diversion.
C) Country network dialling.
D) Calling number display.

5 In which common household appliance would you find a magnetron?
A) A television set.
B) A mobile phone.
C) A washing machine.
D) A microwave oven.

6 Which of the following popular fast-food meals had the least amount of fat, according to a recent CHOICE test?
A) McDonald's cheeseburger with regular fries.
B) Half (three slices) of a regular-sized vegetarian pan pizza from Pizza Hut
C) Red Rooster ¼ chicken and chips.
D) A chicken fillet burger and regular chips from KFC.

7 For the average Australian male, commercially brewed beer is one of the main sources of vitamin B. **True or false?**

8 A new technology called 'G-Code' was introduced into Australia in March this year. What is G-Code?
A) A new barcode scheme for supermarket stock control.
B) A new method of programming video recorders.
C) A new food additive labelling method.
D) A new operating system specially designed for notebook computers.

9 What is the AMPS network?
A) The current analogue mobile phone network.
B) A computer network set up and used by insurance companies.
C) The network that connects automatic teller machines to a main bank branch.
D) The network of interlinked power grids which supplies electricity to domestic buildings.

ANSWERS

1. C. This is higher than health experts would like. A target of less than 30% of energy from fat is generally considered desirable.
2. D. It is estimated that currently the average Australian male eats only 23 grams of fibre a day, and the average woman 19 grams.
3. C.
4. D. The idea is that the phone number of a caller is displayed on your phone when it rings.
5. D. The magnetron is the active part of the oven, which converts electrical energy into microwaves.
6. B. Half the vegetarian pizza would contain 13 grams of fat, compared to 31 grams for the cheeseburger and chips and chicken fillet burger and chips, and 37 grams for the ¼ chicken and chips.
7. False. Contrary to popular myth, most commercially brewed beer doesn't contain any vitamin B.
8. B. The idea is that TV guides will publish a number — the G-Code — alongside each program. People with G-Code compatible video recorders, or a stand-alone programmer designed to work with most existing videos, simply enter the number to record the TV show rather than having to manually set the recording times and channel.
9. A. The network was set up by Telecom but is now used by both Telecom and Optus to provide analogue mobile phone services.

RECALLS AND BANS

If you find a recall or ban not on our list, please let us know.

Companies often rent 008 or 1800 numbers for a couple of months after the recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

Black & Decker has recalled BLACK & DECKER JE40-AA JUICERS (date codes 9403 or 9407 stamped on base) as the cutter/strainer may break during operation and damage other parts. Do not use. Return to a Black & Decker service centre or authorised agent for refund of purchase price. Inquiries: 008 331 400.

Cigweld has recalled the CIGWELD TRANSMIG 130 TWIN (796777) (up to serial number 620680, and sold between February and December 1993) as a wiring fault means there is a small probability of electric shock to the operator. Do not use. Return to an accredited Cigweld service agent for modification. Inquiries: phone 008 334 869.

Mercedes-Benz has recalled MERCEDES-BENZ LIGHT COMMERCIAL VEHICLES L 709, LO 812 and L 912 as the brake pedal return stop might break, allowing the pedal to return to a higher position where it might become inaccessible against the lower edge of the dash panel. Owners should ensure the under-dash cover is in place and properly secured. Contact an authorised Mercedes-Benz commercial vehicle dealer for inspection.

Atherton International has recalled ATHERTON, HOMESTYLE and CL HALOGEN LAMP TRANSFORMERS, SF-5 and SF-12 (batch numbers 1082, 1182, 1282, 0183, 0383, 0483) as the insulation between the secondary and primary coils is inadequate and, over prolonged use, the mains voltage may appear on the output. Contact Atherton International for advice on replacement. Phone (02) 681 3666.

UD Nissan Diesel and UD Oceania have recalled UD NISSAN DIESEL CGA40 VEHICLES (chassis range 00001 to 00156) as the steering idler arm might break during use, leading to loss of steering control. Contact a UD Nissan Diesel dealership to arrange inspection and replacement of the steering idler arm free of charge.

Toyota has recalled TOYOTA VN LEXCENS (produced between August 1989 and October 1990) as the driver's seatbelt webbing may be abraded due to the position of the stalk and buckle assembly. Contact your dealer for inspection and any necessary replacement of parts. Affected vehicle identification numbers are: VNL19H, VNL35H, VNX19H, VNK19H, VNK35H, with production serial numbers from KT299500 to MT465000.

General Motors-Holden's has recalled HOLDEN VN COMMODORE, CALAIS and VG UTE VEHICLES (produced between August 1988 and October 1990) as the driver's seatbelt webbing may be abraded due to the position of the stalk and buckle assembly. Contact your dealer for inspection and any necessary replacement of parts. Affected vehicle identification numbers are in the range L290000 to L465000.

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We work on behalf of Australian consumers by producing and providing useful and accessible information, and representing and advancing their interests.

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OCTOBER 1993 — SEPTEMBER 1994

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